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The works of John Angell James

THE WORKS

OF

JOHN ANGELL JAMES

ONEWHILE MINISTER OF THE CHURCH ASSEMBLING IN
CARRS LANE BIRMINGHAM

EDITED BY HIS SON.

VOL. X.

THE ANXIOUS INQUIRER AFTER SALVATION.
CHRISTIAN PROGRESS.
THE CHRISTIAN PROFESSOR.

LONDON HAMILTON ADAMS & CO.
BIRMINGHAM HUDSON & SON.
MDCCCLXI.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

BY

JOHN ANGELL JAMES

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"The Anxious Inquirer after Salvation Directed and Encouraged," "Christian Progress," "The Christian Professor," "Christian Fellowship, or the Church Member's Guide," and a Manual for the Author's Church, preceded by a Tract and a Preface to a friend's work, are here collected into two volumes. The Editor had determined on entitling this division of the Author's works "The Christian Life" before he observed that a treatise so called was in the course of sale, and he has retained the title, as no confusion can result from it.

The work first mentioned has the interest (without adverting to its subject) of being the Author's masterpiece, by which he became best and most widely known in the church of God. The circulation which it has attained in the British Empire and in the United States is unexampled, and very interesting details connected with it will be found in the Author's Life. It has been thought to confuse Justification and Pardon, but the quotations, made in proof of this, point out the distinction between them supposed to be disregarded. Statements contained in it have also been objected to as representing faith to be merely an act of the intellect, but the expressions used convey the idea of trust and self-appropriation also. And this second objection seems to answer a third, that the reader is detained from the contemplation of Christ, in order that he may test (by this trust) the reality of his faith. Passages relating to the imputation of Christ's righteousness have been considered inconsistent with each other, which, when quoted entire, appear in harmony. The use in this work of the words objective and subjective has been found

fault with by another writer, but there seems to be no good reason to abstain from phrases in common use which have the merit of conciseness. Besides, words much used in religious composition soon acquire a technical meaning, and the disuse of them tends to uncertainty.

"The Christian Professor," and "The Church Member's Guide," were written, the latter expressly, and the former chiefly, for Congregationalists, and are accordingly denominational in their views and in several of their topics; but it is hoped that they are calculated to be useful to all who believe in and aim at the communion of saints.

The copyright of the "Anxious Inquirer" was purchased by the Tract Society, and "Christian Progress" and the Tract included in this volume were written for them; and the Editor gladly expresses his acknowledgment of their kindness in permitting them to be reprinted together.

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THE GREAT CHANGE.

Reader, whoever you are whose eye shall read these pages, you have, indeed, just cause for anxiety, whether you feel it or not. Did you ever, in serious moments, and in a serious manner, ask such questions as these: "What am I? Whence came I? Who sent me here? What is my business in this world? What is to become of me when I go hence?" To say nothing of religion, does not reason press such inquiries on your attention? You find yourself in existence, possessing a rational soul; you know you cannot remain here long, and must soon go and lie down in the grave with your forefathers; but does your history end there? Is there no world beyond the tomb? There is: reason suggests it; revelation proves it. Yes; you are not only mortal, but immortal. Immortality! What a word! what a thing! Did you ever revolve the idea? A deathless creature, an everlasting existence! Such is your soul. You are ever walking on the precipice of eternity, and any moment, the next for aught you can tell, you may fall over it. Eternal duration alone, apart from the consideration whether it is to be spent in torment or in bliss, is an awful idea. You are to live somewhere for ever. Should this matter be allowed to lie forgotten among the thousand unconsidered sub-

jects? Should it be treated with indifference, excite no reflection, produce no anxiety? How can you help being anxious? Ought you not to be anxious? Going on step by step to eternity, should you not pause, ponder, and say, "Whither am I tending?" The rational course is, either to disprove your immortality, or seriously to reflect upon it: either to persuade yourself that, though you live as a man, you will die as a brute, or else to act as an immortal being: either to profess the gloomy negation of atheism, or else to prepare for everlasting existence. The careless infidel is more consistent than the unanxious, nominal believer in revelation: for a man to express his belief that he is immortal, and yet to care nothing about immortality, is the most monstrous inconsistency in the universe. Ought you not to be anxious?

But this is not all. Consider your history; look back upon your past life; pry into your heart; examine yourself. Would not reason, even if there were no Bible, discover to you much in your conduct that you must condemn. Admitting there is a God, (and you believe there is,) does not conscience tell you of many duties omitted, and many sins committed? This is discerned by the dim taper of your own reason; but let in the broad day-light, the bright sunshine of Divine revelation, and then what alarming defects, what appalling transgressions are seen! Think of a God so holy, that the heavens are unclean before him, and his angels charged with folly; a law so perfect, that a sinful feeling violates its precept and incurs its penalty: what, then, must be your sinfulness in the sight of God! Try yourself, not by your own self-love, nor by man's erring judgment, nor by the opinions of flattering

companions, but by the infallible standard of God's holy word; and from such an ordeal you must return with the awful declaration sounding in your ears, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." It is not hyperbole, but sober truth, to say that your sins are more in number than the hairs of your head. Why, if you had sinned but once only in all your life, you would have had just cause for solicitude. That one sin should break your peace, disturb your sleep, and imbitter your enjoyments, by the solicitude it awakened, till there was reason to hope it was forgiven. That one sin would bring upon you the condemnation of God's righteous law, and would be a cause of more just anxiety than the discovery of the most fearful diseases in your body, or the greatest losses of your property. What, then, should be the solicitude awakened by sins innumerable, committed in childhood, youth, and manhood, against God and man, in opposition to reason and conscience, in despite of the Holy Scriptures, and the remonstrances of ministers and friends? What! going on to eternity with all this load of sin upon the conscience, and yet without solicitude?

Consider your mortality! Your breath is in your nostrils. You are not certain of another moment. The concerns of your immortal soul, the means of grace, the opportunities of salvation, the interests of eternity, ever hang on the passing instant, are all suspended upon the brittle thread of human life, and are dependent upon the frail tenure of a beating pulse. You know not that your term of existence is long enough to enable you to read through this book. Now, if death, which is ever following after you, were the end of your existence, there would be no room for anxiety: at any

rate none for the anxiety which prompts to preparation; whatever reason there would be for dread and dismay: but death is not the end, it is but the gate into eternity. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." Annihilation would be fearful enough: to plunge into the gulf of oblivion, to cease to be for ever, how horrible! But how much more horrible eternal consciousness, attended with eternal torment! Did you ever weigh the import of that most awful of all words, hell? Death is a terrific monosyllable: from the cold touch of that last enemy all sentient beings recoil with horror. But death is only as the dark, heavy, iron-covered door of the prison, which opens to, while it conceals, the sights and sounds of the dungeon. Oh that first moment after death! what disclosures, what scenes, what feelings come with that moment! And that moment must come, may come soon. Should you not be anxious?

Your want of anxiety, if you are really without it, is a proof of your want of religion, and of all meetness for eternity. A religion without anxiety is no religion at all. It is impossible to be saved without being anxious to be saved: solicitude to be saved is the first step towards salvation. It might as soon be conceived that a man could be saved in his sins, as in his carelessness and indifference. The first and most natural inquiry of every one who is really in earnest about his soul, is, "What shall I do to be saved?" What intense solicitude is breathed in that most solemn inquiry! Can any man know how holy God is, how strict his law is, how evil a thing sin is, how great a blessing salvation is, how glorious heaven is, how dreadful hell is, and how awful eternity is, and not, if his mind is really and

seriously directed to these subjects, be anxious? It were more rational to imagine a man could have his property, his liberty, his life hanging in suspense, and yet feel no solicitude, than that he could be truly religious, and yet have no anxiety about his soul. The concern of some, who have been awakened to serious reflection, has been so great, that it has for a while disordered their intellects: this is excessive, and has arisen from want of clear knowledge of what can relieve their solicitude: but there never yet was one who was truly saved, who did not bear with him along the road to glory the burden, though not an unrelieved one, of a deep solicitude about his eternal welfare.

The anxiety of others on your behalf, ought to make you anxious for yourself. It would be improper, except in the same figurative sense as pity and other emotions are ascribed to God in the Scripture, to ascribe anxiety to him; but in this sense we may. God is solicitous about you; he has looked upon your soul, and its fallen state, with deep and infinite concern; his Divine compassion has yearned over you; he has felt such anxiety for you, as to send his Son to die upon the cross for you, his Spirit to renew and sanctify you, his Bible to instruct you, and his ministers to warn you. Jesus Christ has been so anxious for you, that he has actually died for you upon the cross, and commissioned his servants to make known to you his love. The Spirit is anxious for you, and is ever striving with you in the Bible, and your conscience. Angels are anxious for you, and are waiting to become ministering spirits to your salvation. Devils are anxious to prevent your eternal happiness; which shows the greatness of your danger, and the just ground you have for alarm.

Ministers are anxious for you, and labour, and pray, and preach for your conversion. Your parents, if pious, are anxious for you, and are supplicating, amidst tears and waiting and watching, for your salvation. Friends are anxious for you, and are writing and talking to you about your soul's concerns. The church of God is anxious for you, and is interceding for you with the God of all grace; and you, you only, are without anxiety. Is it not surprising and affecting, that you alone should be indifferent to your salvation; that you should remain torpid and careless at the centre of this universal and deep solicitude.

Your very want of solicitude should be a cause of anxiety to you. You must be convinced that there is ground for it. You cannot be so utterly ignorant of the nature, importance, and claims of religion, as not to know that there is much in it both calculated and designed to produce a serious thoughtfulness. There have been moments, one should think, when the subject would force itself upon your attention, as one pre-eminently deserving the consideration of a rational and immortal creature; when, by some alarming sermon, or by some impressive event, or by some faithful warning, it would speak to you as a messenger from heaven, and with the voice of God; when an incipient pensiveness was stealing over the soul, and filling your whole field of vision with the realities of eternity: but your earthly-mindedness soon suppressed all this; the transient thoughtfulness subsided, and the current of your volatility, arrested for a short season, flowed onward in its course with its usual impetuosity, and you are now as far from any thing serious as ever. Astounding spectacle! A rational creature, anxious about a thousand

things, yet not anxious about the soul! Agitated, perplexed, inquisitive about little matters of mere passing interest, which the next day will be forgotten; and yet neglecting that great subject, which swallows them all up, as the ocean does the drops of rain that fall upon it. Your health, your property, your prospects, your friends, any thing, every thing, but your soul, and your soul's salvation, seizes and carries you away! So that you see you can be serious. You cannot plead in excuse for yourself, any natural inability, any paralysis of the powers of the mind, any utter incompetency for being occupied with such matters. Nor can you offer in defence of yourself, the excuse, that anxiety would be unavailing, that it would be only a useless self-torture, a tantalizing effort, which would be for ever reaching after an object, which as regularly receded from you. No. You can think, and reason, and desire, and hope, in reference to religion, as in reference to any other subject; nor is there any subject in which enlightened, well-directed, persevering solicitude would be so sure of gaining its end, as in reference to this. None shall seek in vain here, who seek aright. God has pledged his promise, his oath, for the salvation of all who truly repent and believe. Where, in temporal matters, there is only hope, in spiritual ones there is absolute certainty.

And now, to bring these remarks to a conclusion, I would speak to you for a few moments on the subject about which it concerns you to be anxious, I mean your conversion to God. This is the most momentous change in the universe, the greatest which God can produce, or man can undergo. In some respects, it is greater than that which takes place when

the redeemed, emancipated spirit drops the fetters of corruption, and soars away in happy freedom from earth to heaven; for heaven is but the perfection and perpetuation of the change which is wrought in conversion. How impressively does the apostle James speak of this, where he says, "He which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins!" Shall save a soul from death! A dead body is a fearful object, but how much more so a dead soul! Dead, not as to rationality, but to spirituality: dead to God, to holiness, to salvation. Perhaps you never reflected upon this. How eloquently, how impressively has it been touched upon by a great writer!

"What, my brethren, if it be lawful to indulge such a thought, would be the funeral obsequies of a lost soul? Where shall we find the tears fit to be wept at such a spectacle? or, could we realize the calamity in all its extent, what tokens of commiseration and concern would be deemed equal to the occasion? Would it suffice for the sun to veil his light, and the moon her brightness; to cover the ocean with mourning, and the heavens with sackcloth? Or, were the whole fabric of nature to become animated and vocal, would it be possible for her to utter a groan too deep, or a cry too piercing, to express the magnitude and extent of such a catastrophe?"

This is not too strongly put, nor is the solemnity of the figure out of proportion to the magnitude of the awful truth to be illustrated. Now, conversion means the resurrection of the soul instead of its continued death. It is the rising into a new, glorious, and immortal life of the moral principle, compared with which, even the resurrection of the body, when it shall forsake the darkness, decay, and imprisonment of the sepulchre, and, in obedience to the call of God, put on incorruption and immortality, is but a dim manifestation of the power

and glory of the Redeemer. This is the blessed change set forth in the present volume; and it is a change which must take place in you, or the obsequies above alluded to, and not the resurrection, will take place with regard to your soul. Oh that I could excite a hope, and awaken an expectation in your mind, of the felicities of this new, divine, heavenly, and eternal existence. Would that I could send on your attention to the following pages, with the kindling ambition to be a partaker of this sublime transformation; with something of an anticipation that you are about to hear and obey the voice which saith, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Yes, the day-spring from on high may be about to visit the grave in which your soul lies dead in trespasses and sins. A new existence, unknown and unthought of till now, with all its energies and activities, a career of eternal holiness and happiness, may be opening before you.

What an impressive view of the consequences of conversion does the declaration of our Divine Lord present to you, when he says, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth!" Repentance is conversion. Now, the conversion, not merely of a nation, or a multitude, but of a single individual, is of such importance as to be known in heaven, and is a source of such joy as to fill the mansions of the blessed with new interest and fresh rapture. Your conversion would do this. Your conversion would draw upon you the congratulations of the innumerable company of angels. Think of this. It is not the joy of ministers and friends upon earth, but of the angels in heaven, who, from their position, capacity,

and experience, can better appreciate the immensity of the consequences of conversion; can penetrate far deeper than saints on earth can do, into the heights, and depths, and breadths, and lengths of that eternity, which is the seal and crown of the felicity promised to every real penitent; and can more accurately comprehend "the mysterious and undefinable value of the soul, its intense susceptibility as a rational, moral, accountable substance, incapable alike of extinction or unconsciousness through infinite duration." Surely, surely, such a consideration alone is sufficient to awaken and sustain the most intense anxiety, that you might be the subject of a change with which are connected, as its inevitable result, the joyful sympathies of the celestial hierarchy over a felicity at once immense and eternal.

Such, then, is the design of this valuable work, to explain the nature, and enforce the necessity of conversion to God. It comes with a message from God to you; and it is a messenger of mercy and not of wrath. It comes to lead you to the fountain of life, the way of salvation, the path to glory, honour, and immortality. A special providence may have placed it in your hands. Receive it not with indifference, treat it not with carelessness. A seraph from the throne of the eternal, a herald from the world of light, could not bring to you a subject in which you are more deeply, or more directly interested. God himself has nothing to say to you more momentous, or more necessary, than the admonition, "Be converted."

Read these pages with the deepest seriousness of mind. Choose a season of retirement; put all worldly

subjects aside; collect and concentrate your thoughts on that one word, conversion. Read as with paradise opening above you, the bottomless pit yawning beneath you, eternity spreading out before you, and the eye of God fixed upon you. Read with docility, attention, and earnestness. Read with the recollection that, after you have perused the book, you will never be again as you have been, since, if you are not converted, you will acquire new light and new responsibility, by which an unconverted state will involve a deeper guilt, and a more dreadful punishment. Read especially, with sincere, fervent, and believing prayer for the help of God's Holy Spirit. And may the Lord render the perusal the means of your conversion, and of the salvation of your immortal soul.

BELIEVE AND BE SAVED.

Then the way to be saved from sin and hell, is to believe in Jesus Christ? But what is it to believe? Take the following illustration: "I once saw a lad," says an American writer, "on the roof of a very high building, where several men were at work. He was gazing about with apparent unconcern, when suddenly his foot slipped, and he fell. In falling he caught by a rope, and hung suspended in mid air, where he could neither get up nor down, and where it was evident he could sustain himself but a short time. He perfectly knew his situation, and expected that in a few minutes he must drop, and be dashed to pieces.

"At this fearful moment, a kind and powerful man rushed out of the house, and standing beneath him with extended arms, called out, 'Let go the rope, and I will receive you. I can do it. Let go the rope, and I promise that you shall escape unhurt.'

"The boy hesitated a moment, and then quitted his hold, and dropped easily and safely into the arms of his deliverer.

"Here," thought I, "is an illustration of faith. Here is a simple act of faith. The boy was sensible of his danger. He saw his deliverer, and heard his voice. He believed in him, trusted to him, and, letting

go every other dependence and hope, dropped into his arms, and was safe." He was saved by faith.

Reader, you are a sinner against God; for "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." As a sinner, you are under the curse of the law, the wrath of God, and exposed to the bitter pains of eternal death; for it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Fearful situation! Appalling danger! From which you are unable to deliver yourself. But "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." So then there is salvation to be obtained; you need not perish, though your sins be as numerous as the hairs of your head; for "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Since Christ died to save us from our sins, you who have the gospel proclaimed to you will not be lost simply because you are a sinner, however great an one; but should you perish, it will be because you have not believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is unbelief that leads to eternal ruin, and faith to everlasting salvation. "This is a faithful saying," that is, a true one, "and worthy of all acceptation," that is, deserving of every one's belief, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

If, then, you press the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" notice the apostle's answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But, perhaps, you ask the question what you are to do, with some vague idea that you are to be saved by your own doings. Now this is altogether a mistake. If you could be saved by your own doings, what need was there of Christ's dying to save you? Just observe what

the apostle Peter said to the Jews soon after they had crucified Christ: "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Fix your eye and your mind upon His name only, and on that important word "believe;" the whole way and method of salvation lie in that one word, that little common, but momentous word. You see it repeated again and again in many parts of the New Testament. "To him that worketh not," mark that, worketh not, "but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness;" "By grace are ye saved through faith;" "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace."

Before I go further, let it be observed that "to believe," and "to have faith," mean the same thing: faith means believing, and believing means faith. Do you ask what a sinner is to believe, or have faith in, that he may be saved? the answer is, In Christ. "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." Whosoever truly understands this, and really believes it, will certainly be saved. This, then, is what you are to believe, That God, out of pure love to a lost and guilty world, sent his Son to die a sacrifice for sin; and trusting in him alone you will be saved.

But, perhaps, you will say, "I begin to see this very clearly, and am now convinced that my salvation is all of grace through faith; but I am a little puzzled about the nature of faith. How am I to believe, and what is it to believe, because it seems to me as if I had never doubted the truth of the gospel." That is, you never professed to disbelieve it; you never avowed yourself an infidel. But multitudes who never professed to dis-

believe are without faith. You ask how you are to believe. Pray are there two ways of believing? You know what it is to believe the word of a fellow creature who has promised you some benefit; you trust to his assurance, and expect the favour. Only change the object, and put Christ in the place of this fellow creature, and faith means the same thing.

Are you still perplexed about the nature of faith? turn to the fact related at the commencement of this tract. Think of the situation of the lad there spoken of. Think of his danger, there is a representation of your own. Think of his helplessness and hopelessness; he could do nothing for himself; he could neither get back to the place from whence he fell, nor extricate himself from his perilous situation, and descend in safety to the ground; and if no one had come to his rescue, he must have perished: there, also, is an illustration of your own case. You cannot go back to innocence, nor can you make any atonement for your sins. Could you be holy as an angel from this moment, that would make no satisfaction to Divine justice for your past transgressions, inasmuch as you owe to God all that you can do; and future obedience can no more make atonement for past sins, than the payment for goods you may in future purchase, will clear off old debts.

But now look at the means by which the youth was saved. It was by the interposition of another; so you must be saved entirely by another, even by Christ.

The act of a sinner's faith in Christ is illustrated by the case stated. There stood the boy's deliverer, saying to him, "Drop into my arms. I will receive you, I can." The youth hesitated, that is, he doubted for a

moment, but at length he quitted his hold of the rope, and dropped into the arms of the man, and was safe. He simply believed the promise of him who came to his rescue, quitted his dependence on the rope, and was saved. So Jesus Christ says to you in the gospel, "I died for sinners; quit every ground and dependence, loose your hold from everything else; let go the rope of your self-righteousness; trust in me, and I will save you."

What was it the youth believed concerning the individual, who came to his help?

1. His ability to save him. He saw he was a man, and not a child, for had it been a boy like himself who had stood beneath, and said, "Drop into my arms, I will receive you," he would have replied, "Stand out of the way, you are too weak to hold me up; and if I fall upon you, I shall crush you as well as kill myself." Just so, you are to believe that Christ is "mighty to save:" that "he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." This is a part of the testimony concerning him. He is God as well as man, in one mysterious, glorious person. He was sent by the Divine Father to undertake our cause. He did everything necessary for our salvation, by bearing our sins in his body on the tree, making a full and complete atonement for them, and bringing in an everlasting righteousness on the ground of which we can be justified, and God be just. Hence we must believe that Christ is able to save us.

2. The youth believed in the willingness and sincerity of his deliverer. He saw him standing with his arms extended: heard him calling to trust in him; was

persuaded that he did not mean to mock or to deceive him, and let him fall to the ground; and, therefore, confided in his truth and mercy, as well as in his strength. Thus the sinner is to believe in Christ's truth and mercy, in his entire willingness to save him. He has said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Faith means believing this; being persuaded that Christ will not, cannot reject a sinner that depends upon him.

3. The boy's faith included a persuasion that the assurance of help was pledged to him. In this case there was no other to whom the promise, "I will receive you," could apply. If you do not believe that Christ will save you, as he has promised, you have no faith. He died for sinners, then he died for you; he invites sinners, then he invites you; he will cast out none, then he will not cast out you. It is true your name is not mentioned, but then it is not excepted. If an angel were sent from the throne of God to tell you that you might be saved, this would not make it more certain than it is already that you may be saved by faith in Christ.

4. The faith of this youth included also a persuasion that the man was willing to save him immediately, and not half an hour from the time of his coming to his assistance. This also is necessary to a right faith in Christ. The work of salvation is finished; the atonement is made, and God is as willing to save the sinner at the present time, as he ever can or will be. The testimony to Christ in the gospel is, not that he will be able and willing to save the sinner at some future time,

but that he is so now: and he that does not believe this is without faith, for this is the truth declared concerning Christ.

Reader, now see what faith is, a persuasion that Christ is able and willing to save you now, because this is testified in the gospel. "How simple!" you exclaim. Yes, thus simple is the way of salvation.

This is the way to be saved. He that hath this faith is justified, and is at peace with God. When the sinner believes, he is safe; he is like Noah when he had just entered the ark, and the door was shut.

And now go on to consider the effects of faith. As soon as the youth saw his deliverer come to his rescue, heard his promise of assistance, and believed his word, he was glad. Every word delighted him. "I will save you; I can." Could he hear such words, and not rejoice? Impossible. His faith brought comfort; and so will the sinner's faith, when properly exercised. It is impossible he should fully believe the gospel and not have his anxiety relieved, his fears dispersed, his comfort commenced. The jailor as soon as he believed rejoiced with all his house. The converts on the day of Pentecost gladly received the word. In whom "believing, ye rejoice," says the apostle, "with joy unspeakable and full of glory." It is impossible to believe glad tidings concerning ourselves, and not be made glad by them.

And would not the youth be grateful to his deliverer? Yes, and so does the sinner feel towards the Saviour in whom he believes. And would love be wanting in the heart of the rescued youth? If before he had been hostile to his benefactor, enmity would

depart, and love come in its place. What can he now do to please him, How can he serve him, in what way testify his thankfulness for such a deliverance? And in your case, faith will "work by love," if it really exists, and the Holy Spirit will enable and dispose you to bring forth the necessary fruits and effects of faith. Having believed the love which God has to you, constrained by his grace, you will love him in return. Love will lead to obedience; an obedience cheerful, generous, delightful. You will not obey from a principle of mere dread, nor of self-righteousness, nor with a mercenary feeling of obtaining heaven, but from love. You will show your faith by your works; and think you can never do enough for Him who has died for you.

Thus faith will change all your sentiments, your feelings, your tastes, your conduct. It will open the door of the soul to the entrance of all true holiness. Being "in Christ," you will become "a new creature;" old things will pass away, behold, all things will become new. By faith your heart will be purified. By faith you will "overcome the world." By faith you will live, and walk. But till you have this faith in Christ, you can do no good works. You may read the Scriptures, hear sermons, present many prayers, leave off former sins; but till you believe in Jesus Christ, these are not good works in the Scripture sense of good works, for we are told that "without faith it is impossible to please God." Faith is your first business as soon as the gospel is addressed to you, and as long as you withhold this, you are still in your sins and under condemnation, whatever may be your convictions, your feelings, your resolutions, and your prayers.

Reader, you are now called on to believe and live. But you still hesitate. Why? Bring forth all your objections. You state the following:

1. "I hope to believe at some time or other." You are required to believe at once. "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Is not the work of redemption completed, and Christ willing, able, and waiting to save you? Is it not an insult to God to say, "I will believe in thee some time hereafter, but not now?"

2. "I cannot believe without the Spirit's help." The Holy Spirit is promised to them that ask. Believe, depending upon the Spirit for assistance. Believe in the promise of the Spirit as well, and at the same time, as in the promise of Christ.

3. "I must repent first." True, you must repent, but there cannot be true repentance without faith; both are closely connected together, and the neglect of the one cannot be pleaded as an excuse for the neglect of the other.

4. "I strive to believe, and cannot." Yet you believe a fellow creature, who might deceive you, rather than God, who is true and cannot lie. The way to believe the gospel is to consider that it is "worthy of all acceptation."

5. "I do not yet feel sufficient convictions of sin." The gospel testifies that you are a sinner, and fully believing its testimony, you will be constrained to feel your own sinfulness. As to feeling that you are a sinner, the way to feel is to believe. Faith produces feeling. Instead of saying, "How can I believe if I do not feel?" You should say, "How can I feel aright if I do not believe?"

6. "If I had more feeling, I should have greater encouragement and warrant to believe." What a wicked thought! Is not God's promise encouragement and warrant enough to believe, without your feeling? Is not God to be believed unless you have certain emotions in exercise? If you had a thousand times more feeling than you have, it would not be your feeling, but Christ's invitation and promise that are your warrant to exercise faith.

7. "But my sins are great, numerous, and long continued." "The blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin." It is as great a sin for the most wicked sinner on earth not to believe that Christ will save him, as it is for any other person not to believe. Christ says he will save the chief of sinners, and the chief of sinners ought to believe this.

8. "But must I come as I am? Ought I not to wait till I am better prepared?" You are to come just as you are. Recollect you are to come as a sinner, not as a saint. Jesus Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. How can you prepare yourself while in unbelief for faith? All you do in unbelief is sin. Can sin prepare you for coming to Christ? If you could make yourself worthy to come to Christ, what need was there of Christ's dying at all? Men are saved from first to last through Christ's worthiness, not their own. You are to go to him by faith to be made worthy in and through him.

9. "But is it not incredible that we should obtain forgiveness and salvation through so simple a thing as faith?" This shows that you do not understand the way of salvation even yet. You are not saved for faith, but by it. It is not your act of believing that is the

meritorious cause of your salvation, but the blood and righteousness of Christ. There is no more merit in faith, as an act of yours, to save you, than in any other work. All that faith does is to receive the testimony that Jesus Christ will save you. You must keep your eye upon Christ, as revealed in the gospel, and not upon your faith. In fact, faith is the eye that looks to Christ.

10. "I sometimes think I believe because I perceive evidences of faith; and then again I am plunged into distress because these evidences are lost, or are so dim as scarcely to be perceived at all." If you are at such a loss to determine whether you believe or not, it becomes you seriously to inquire whether you are not looking to yourself, instead of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you were going to gaol for debt, and some neighbour promised to pay your debts, could you not tell whether you believed him or not? Many persons are searching for evidences of faith before they have it, and are looking into themselves for something to believe, instead of looking unto Christ. When they have found what they consider to be a good mark, then they are all hope and exultation; and when this fades, or is not discernible, their feelings are changed to doubt, gloom, and distress. Thus the mind is taken off from Christ to themselves, and instead of believing in the gospel, they are believing or endeavouring to believe in their own belief.

11. "I am praying, using the means, and waiting to believe." But you ought not to delay. You have delayed too long already. The waiting you refer to means, not believing. Consider this most seriously, because many seem to think there is a kind of merit in

waiting. As to using the means, pray, what means? "Reading the Scriptures, and hearing sermons," you reply. These should lead you at once to believe rather than be made excuses for unbelief. How much more reading and hearing do you think is necessary to persuade you that God is true, and cannot lie? Still it cannot be denied that you ought to pray, but it should be in faith. Believe, and then diligently use all the means of grace to strengthen your faith.

And now, reader, what is the conclusion to which you should come? Simply this: as a lost and ruined sinner, to believe in Him who died as a sacrifice upon the cross for the salvation of the world. How can you have one moment's peace, as long as you are in doubt whether you are in a state of salvation? How can you lie down at night and sleep, as long as you have no reason to believe your sins are pardoned and you are at peace with God? How long will you go on resting in your own efforts without believing? It will not do. Till you believe, you can have no peace, except it be a false peace, which, of all states of mind, is the most dangerous and most to be dreaded. Weary sinners! here are glad tidings for you, "He that believeth shall be saved." There is but one step between you and life, that step is faith; it may, by God's help, be taken this very moment, and the Divine Spirit holds out his hand to assist you in taking it. Oh, hesitate not, nor delay; while you linger, time rolls on, eternity advances, death lifts up his dart, and if he strikes before you believe, you are undone for ever. It will then be too late; for though you will have a kind of faith in hell, it will do you no good, for it will be only that of the devils who believe and tremble. Who can describe

the lamentation that will arise, when, as the unbelieving soul passes the boundary line that parts time from eternity, the voice of the righteous Judge will cry, "It is too late!" and the lost spirit, in an agony of despair, will echo back the fearful sound, "It is too late!" But it is not yet too late, believe and be saved.

Should this be read by any weak believer, who may be writing bitter things against himself, let him deeply consider the fulness and freeness of the gospel, and the way to obtain comfort as described by the apostles Paul and Peter; "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith." "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." "In whom," (Jesus Christ,) "though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul." And let the prayer of Christ's disciples be adopted by every believer, "Lord, increase our faith."

THE

ANXIOUS INQUIRER AFTER SALVATION DIRECTED AND ENCOURAGED.

"What must I do to be saved?"
"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."
Acts xvi. 30, 31.

PREFACE.

All subjects must be taught by elementary treatises: to this rule, religion forms no exception; and as books for children compose a very useful, though humble department, in general literature, so in the great science of salvation, he aims at no unimportant object, who writes for those who are anxious to be converted, and who are willing, for that purpose, to become as little children in the school of Christ. Such is my design; to accomplish which, I have sought after the greatest simplicity of style. Writing for babes in Christ, I have given little more than the alphabet of personal religion; which must be learnt in order to future progress. Almost all teachers, whether of children or of adults, commit the error of taking for granted, that their pupils know more than they really do; it is far better to err in the opposite extreme. If any are disposed to think I have carried my endeavours after simplicity too far, and are desirous of something more elaborate, I refer them to the excellent work of Dr. Henry, of Charleston, entitled, "Letters to a Friend," recommended by Dr Pye Smith, the object of it is precisely the same as my own, but it is written in a more diffuse style, and illustrated by a greater variety of facts.

J. A. J.

April, 1834.

INTRODUCTION.

DIRECTIONS FOR THE PROFITABLE READING OF THE FOLLOWING TREATISE.

It may seem strange to some persons, that I should give directions for the performance of an act so well understood as the perusal of a book; and especially the perusal of a book of so simple and elementary a kind as this. But the fact is, that multitudes either do not know, or do not at the time remember how to read to advantage; and, therefore, profit but little by what they read. Besides, simple and elementary as is this treatise, it is on a subject of infinite and eternal importance, and will be perused in the most critical season of a man's everlasting history; when, in a very peculiar sense, every means of grace, and this among the rest, will be either "a savour of death unto death, or of life unto life," to the reader. Tremendous idea! But strictly true.

Reader, whosoever thou art, it is no presumptuous thought of the Author, to believe that thou wilt remember the contents of this small treatise, either with pleasure and gratitude in heaven, or with remorse and despair in hell. Can it then be an impertinently officious

act, to remind thee how to read with advantage what I have written?

1. Take it with you into your closet; I mean your place of retirement for prayer; for, of course, you have such a place. Prayer is the very soul of all religion, and privacy is the very life of prayer itself. This is a book to be read when you are alone; when none is near but God and your conscience; when you are not hindered by the presence of a fellow-creature from the utmost freedom of manner, thought, and feeling; when, unobserved by any human eye, you can lay down the book, and meditate, or weep, or fall upon your knees to pray, or give vent to your feelings in short and sudden petitions to God. I charge you then to reserve this volume for your private seasons of devotion and thoughtfulness: look not into it in company, except it be the company of a poor trembling and anxious inquirer, like yourself.

2. Read it with deep seriousness. Remember, it speaks to you of God, of eternity, of salvation, of heaven, and of hell. Take it up with something of the awe, "that warns you how you touch a holy thing." It meets you in your solicitude about your soul's welfare; it meets you fleeing from destruction, escaping for your life, crying out, "What shall I do to be saved?" and proffers its assistance to guide you for refuge to "the hope set before you in the gospel." It is itself serious; its Author is serious; it is on a serious subject; and demands to be read in a most devout and serious mood. Take it not up lightly, nor read it lightly. If your spirit be not as solemn as usual, do not touch it; and when you do touch it, put away every

other subject, and endeavour to realize the idea that God, salvation, and eternity are before you; and that you are actually collecting the ingredients of the cup of salvation, or the wormwood and gall to imbitter the cup of damnation.

3. Read it with earnest prayer. It can do you no good, without God's blessing: nothing short of Divine grace can render it the means of instructing your mind, or impressing your heart. It will convey no experimental knowledge, relieve no anxiety, dissipate no doubts, and afford neither peace nor sanctification, if God do not give his Holy Spirit: and if you would have the Spirit, you must ask for his influence. If, therefore, you wish it to benefit you, do not read another page, till you have most fervently, as well as sincerely, prayed to God for his blessing to accompany the perusal. I have earnestly prayed to God to enable me to write it, and if you as earnestly pray to him to enable you to read it, there is thanksgiving in store for us both; for usually what is begun in prayer, ends in praise.

4. Do not read too much at a time. Books that are intended to instruct and impress should be read slowly. Most persons read too much at a time. Your object is not merely to read this treatise through, but to read it so as to profit by it. Food cannot be digested well, if too much be eaten at a time; so neither can knowledge.

5. Meditate on what you read. Meditation bears the same office in the mental constitution, as digestion does in our corporeal system. The first mental exercise is attention, the next is reflection. If we would gain a correct notion of an object, we must not only see it, but

look at it; and so, also, if we would gain knowledge from books, we must not only see the matters treated of, but look steadily at them. Nothing but meditation can enable us to understand or feel. In reading the Scriptures and religious books, we are, or should be, reading for eternity. Salvation depends on knowledge, and knowledge on meditation. At almost every step of our progress through a book which is intended to guide us to salvation, we should pause and ask, "Do I understand this?" Our profiting depends not on the quantity we read, but the quantity we understand. One verse in Scripture, if understood and meditated upon, will do us more good than a chapter, or even a book, read through in haste, and without reflection.

6. Read regularly through in order. Do not wander about from one part to another, and in your eagerness to gain relief, pick and cull particular portions, on account of their supposed suitableness to your case. It is all suitable; and will be found most so by being taken together and as a whole. A rambling method of reading, whether it be the Scriptures or other books, is not to edification: it often arises from levity of mind, and sometimes from impatience; both of which are states very unfriendly to improvement. Remember it is salvation you are in quest of; an object of such transcendent importance, as to be a check upon volatility; and of such value, as to encourage the most exemplary patience.

7. Read calmly. You are anxious to obtain eternal life: you are eagerly asking, "What shall I do to be saved?" But still, you must not allow your solicitude so far to agitate your mind, as to prevent you from

listening calmly and coolly for the answer. In circumstances of great anxiety, men are sometimes so much under the power of excited feelings, that their judgment is bewildered, and thus they are not only prevented from finding out what is best to be done, but from seeing it when it is laid down by another. This anxious and hurried state of mind is very common in those who are just awakened to a concern about salvation; they are restless and eager to gain relief, but are defeated in their object by their very solicitude to obtain it. The Scriptures are read, sermons are heard, advice of friends is received, in a confused state of mind. Now you must guard against this, and endeavour so far to control your thoughts, and calm your perturbation as to attend to the counsels and cautions which are here suggested.

8. I very earnestly recommend the perusal of all those passages of Scripture and chapters which I have quoted, and which, for the sake of brevity, I have only referred to, without quoting the words. I lay great stress upon this. Read this book with the Bible at your elbow, and do not think much of the trouble of turning to the passages quoted. If, unhappily, you should consider me, or my little volume, as a substitute for the Bible, instead of a guide to it, I shall have done you an injury, or rather you will have done yourself an injury by thus employing it. "As new-born babes," says the apostle, "desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." And as those infants thrive best who are fed from the breast of their mothers, so those converts grow most in grace, who are most devoted to a spiritual perusal of the Scriptures. If, therefore, I stand between you and the word of God, I do you great

disservice; but if I should persuade you to read the Scriptures, I shall greatly help you in your religious course. Perhaps, in the present state of your mind, it is not desirable to begin and read regularly the word of God, but to go through those passages which I have selected and recommended.

And now may God, of his great goodness and sovereign grace, deign to bless the perusal of this book to many immortal souls, by making it, however humble the production, the means of conducting them into the path of life!

CHAPTER I.

DEEP SOLICITUDE ABOUT SALVATION REASONABLE AND NECESSARY.

READER, you have lately been awakened, by the mercy of God, to ask, with some degree of anxiety, that momentous question, "What shall I do to be saved?" No wonder you are anxious; the wonder is, that you were not concerned about this matter before, that you are not more deeply solicitous now, and that all who possess the word of God do not sympathize with you in this anxiety. Everything justifies solicitude, and condemns indifference as to this matter. Unconcern about the soul, indifference to salvation, is a most irrational as well as a most guilty state of mind. The wildest enthusiasm about these matters is less surprising and unreasonable than absolute carelessness, as will appear from the following considerations.

1. You are an immortal creature, a being born for eternity, a creature that will never go out of existence. Millions of ages, as numerous as the sands upon the shore, and the drops of the ocean, and the leaves of all the forests on the globe, will not shorten the duration of your being; eternity, vast eternity, incomprehensible eternity, is before you. Every day brings you nearer to everlasting torments or felicity. You may die any

moment; and you are as near to heaven or hell as you are to death. No wonder you are asking, "What shall I do to be saved?"

2. But the reasonableness of this anxiety appears, if you add to this consideration, that you are a sinner. You have broken God's law; you have rebelled against his authority; you have acted as an enemy to him, and made him your enemy. If you had committed only one single act of transgression, your situation would be alarming. One sin would have subjected you to the sentence of his law, and exposed you to his displeasure; but you have committed sins more in number, and greater in magnitude, than you know, or can conceive of. Your whole life has been one continued sin: you have, so far as God is considered, done nothing but sin. Your transgressions have sent up to heaven a cry for vengeance. You are actually under the curse of the Almighty.

3. Consider what the loss of the soul includes. The loss of the soul is the loss of everything dear to man as an immortal creature: it is the loss of heaven, with all its honours, felicities, and glories; it is the loss of God's favour, which is the life of all rational creatures; it is the loss of everything that can contribute to our happiness; and it is the loss of hope, the last refuge of the wretched. The loss of the soul includes in it all that is contained in that dreadful word, Hell: it is the eternal endurance of the wrath of God; it is the lighting down of the curse of the Almighty upon the human spirit; or rather, it is the falling of the human spirit into that curse, as into a lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. How true, as well as solemn, are the words of Christ, "What shall it profit a man,

if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" All the tears that ever have been or ever will be shed on the face of the earth, all the groans that ever have been or ever will be uttered, all the anguish that ever has been or ever will be endured by all the inhabitants of the world, through all the ages of time, do not make up an equal amount of misery to that which is included in the loss of one human soul. Justly therefore do you say, who are exposed to this misery, "What shall I do to be saved?"

4. This solicitude is reasonable if you consider that the eternal loss of the soul is not a rare, but a very common occurrence. It is so tremendous a catastrophe, that if it happened only once in a year, or once in a century, so as to render it barely possible that it should happen to you, it would be unpardonable carelessness not to feel some solicitude about the matter: how much more, then, when, alas! it is an every-day calamity. So far from its being a rare thing for men to go to hell, it is a much rarer thing for them to go to heaven. Our Lord tells us, that the road to destruction is thronged, while the way to life is travelled by few. Hell opens its mouth wide and swallows up multitudes in perdition. How alarming is the idea, and how probable the fact, that you may be among this number! Some that read these pages will very likely spend their eternity with lost souls; it is therefore your wisdom, as well as your duty, to cherish the anxiety which says, "What shall I do to be saved?"

5. Salvation is possible, for if it were not, it would be useless to be anxious about it. It would be cruel to encourage an anxiety which could never be relieved by

the possession of the object which excites it. But your case is not hopeless; you may be saved; you are invited to be saved. Christ has died for your salvation, and God waits to save you; all the opportunities, advantages, helps, and encouragements to salvation are round you; the blessing is within your reach; it is brought near to you; and it will be your own fault if you do not possess it. Your solicitude is not therefore directed to an unattainable object.

6. Salvation has been obtained by multitudes, and why may it not be obtained by you? Millions in heaven are already saved; myriads more are on the road to salvation. God is still as willing, and Christ is still as able, to save you as he was them: why, then, should not you be saved?

7. And then what a blessing is salvation! A blessing that includes all the riches of grace, and all the greater riches of glory; deliverance from sin, death, and hell; the possession of pardon, peace, holiness, and heaven; a blessing, in short, immense, infinite, everlasting; which occupied the mind of Deity from eternity, was procured by the Son of God upon the cross, and will fill eternity with its happiness. Oh, how little, insignificant, and contemptible is the highest object of human ambition, to say nothing of the lower matters of men's desires, compared with salvation! Riches, rank, fame, and honours, are but as the small dust of the balance, when compared with the "salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Who that pretends to the least regard to his own happiness would not say, "What shall I do to be saved?"

8. The circumstances in which you are placed for obtaining this blessing are partly favourable, and partly

unfavourable. The love of God is infinite; the merit of Christ is infinite; the power of the Holy Spirit is infinite: Jehovah is willing and waiting to save you; Christ invites; all things are ready, and the grace of God offered for your conversion. On the other hand, you have a corrupt heart, and are placed in a world where everything seems to combine to draw off your attention from salvation, and to cause you to neglect it. Satan is busy to blind your mind; the world, to fill your imagination and heart with other objects, so that even the "righteous are scarcely saved." You cannot quit the world, and go into monasteries and convents, but must seek salvation amidst the engrossing cares of this busy and troublesome world; where anxiety about the body is so liable to put away anxiety about the soul, and things seen and temporal are likely to withdraw the attention from things that are unseen and eternal. Oh, how difficult it is to pay just enough regard to present things, and yet not too much! How difficult to attend properly to the affairs both of earth and heaven; to be busy for two worlds at once! These circumstances may well excite your solicitude.

Anxiety, then, deep anxiety about salvation, is the most reasonable thing in the world; and I feel almost ready to ask, Can that man have a soul, or know that he has one, who is careless about its eternal happiness? Is he a man or a brute? Is he in the exercise of his reason, or is he a maniac? Ever walking on the edge of the precipice that hangs over the bottomless pit, and not anxious about salvation! Oh, fatal, awful, destructive indifference! Cherish, then, your solicitude. You must be anxious, you ought to be so, you cannot be

saved without it; for no man ever was, or ever will be. The salvation of a lost soul is such a stupendous deliverance, such an infinitely momentous concern, that it is impossible, in the very nature of things, it should be bestowed on any one who is not in earnest to obtain it. This is the very end of your existence, the purpose for which God created you. Apart from this, you are an enigma in creation; a mystery in nature. Why has God given you faculties which seem to point to eternity, and desires which go forward to it, if he has not destined you for it? Eternal salvation is the great end of life: get what you will, if you lose this, you have lost the purpose of existence. Could you obtain all the wealth of the globe; could you rise to the possession of universal empire; could you, by the most splendid discoveries in science, or the most useful inventions in art, or the most magnificent achievements in literature, fill the earth with the fame of your exploits, and send down your name with honour to the latest ages of time, still, if you lost the salvation of your soul, you would have lived in vain. Whatever you may gain, life will be a lost adventure, if you do not gain salvation. The condition of the poorest creature that ever yet obtained eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, although he had but a mere glimmering of intellect, just enough of understanding to apprehend the nature of repentance, although he lived out his days amidst the most squalid poverty and repulsive scenes, although he was unknown even among the poor, and although, when he died, he was buried in a pauper's grave, on which no tear is shed, is infinitely to be preferred to that of the most successful merchant, the greatest conqueror, the profoundest philosopher, or the sublimest poet, that ever

existed, if he lived and died without salvation. The lowest place in heaven is infinitely to be preferred to the highest place on earth. Go on, then, to urge the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" Let no one turn off your attention from this matter. As long as you covet this, your eye, and heart, and hope are fixed on the sublimest object in the universe; and when officious but ignorant friends would persuade you that you are too anxious, point them to the bottomless pit, and ask them if any one can be too anxious to escape its torments? Point them to heaven, and ask them if any one can be too anxious to obtain its glories? Point them to eternity, and ask them if any one can be too anxious to secure immortal life? Point them to the cross of Christ, and ask them if any one can be too anxious to secure the object for which he died?

CHAPTER II.

RELIGIOUS IMPRESSIONS, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF RETAINING AND DEEPENING THEM.

Awakened and anxious sinner, your present situation is a most momentous one. You are in the crisis of your religious history and of your eternal destiny. No tongue can tell, no pen describe, the importance of your present circumstances. You are just arousing from your long slumber of sin and spiritual death, and will now either rise up and run the race that is set before you, or will soon sink back again (as those are likely to do who are only a little disturbed) into a deeper sleep than ever. The Spirit of God is striving with you, and either you will yield to his suggestions, and give yourself up to be led by his gracious influence, or you will grieve him by resistance and neglect, and cause him to depart. God it drawing you with the cords of love; Christ is saying, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock;" the Spirit is striving with you. Yield to these silken bands; open to that gracious Saviour; grieve not, quench not the motions of that Divine Spirit. Salvation is come near, and heaven is opening to your soul. Remember, you may quench the Spirit, not only by direct resistance, but by careless neglect. Do not, I beseech you, be insensible to your situation. A single conviction ought

not to be treated with indifference, or a single impression to be overlooked. You cannot long remain as you now are; your convictions will soon end either in conversion or in greater indifference; like the blossoms of spring, they will soon set in fruit, or fall to the ground. Should your present solicitude diminish, it will soon subside altogether; and if it subside, it may probably never be revived. It is a most dangerous thing to tamper or trifle with convictions of sin and religious impressions. If, then, you would not lose your present feelings, take the following advice:

1. Admit the possibility of losing them. Do not presume that it is impossible for you to relapse. Let there be no approach to the vain-glorious, self-confident temper of the apostle Peter, who said, "Although all should be offended, yet will not I." Nothing is more common than mere transient devotions. The character of Pliable in the "Pilgrim's Progress," is one of every day's occurrence. There are very few that hear the gospel, who are not, at one time or other, the subject of religious impressions. Multitudes, who are lifting up their eyes in torment, are looking back upon lost impressions. Do not conclude that, because you are now so concerned about salvation, you must be saved. Oh no. Many that read these pages under deep solicitude, will add to the number of backsliders. Self-confidence will be sure to end in confusion; while self-diffidence is the way to stand.

2. Dread the idea of relapsing into indifference. Let the bare apprehension make you tremble. Exclaim almost in an agony of spirit, "Oh, if I should prove treacherous; if my goodness should be as the morning cloud or early dew; if this heart of mine, which now

seems so much in earnest, should become indifferent; if my soul, which now seems not far from the kingdom of God, should go back from its very gates, and walk the ways of God no more; if my friends or minister should meet me in a retreating course, and have to say to me, 'You did run well, what has hindered you?' Dreadful change! may God in mercy prevent it." My dear reader, let these be your reflections. Let death seem to you to be coveted, rather than backsliding; let it be your feeling that you would rather go forward in the pursuit of salvation, though you were to die the moment your sins were pardoned, than gain long life and the whole world by going back to indifference. Next to the loss of the soul, there is nothing so dreadful in itself, nor so much to be dreaded, as the loss of religious impressions; and the latter leads on to the former.

3. Make it a subject of devout and earnest prayer that God would render your impressions permanent, by the effectual aid of his Holy Spirit. Reader, here learn these two lessons; that God alone can seal these emotions upon your heart, and that he can be expected to do it only in answer to prayer. It is of infinite consequence that you should, at this stage of your religious history, deeply ponder the great truth, that all true piety in the heart of man is the work of God's Spirit. Do not read another line till you have well weighed that sentiment, and have so wrought it into your heart, as to make it with you a principle of action, and a rule of conduct. Every conviction will be extinguished, every impression will be effaced, unless God himself, by his own sovereign and efficacious grace, render them permanent. If God do not put forth his power, you will

as certainly lose every pious emotion as you now possess any. You may as rationally expect light without the sun, as piety without God. Not a single really holy feeling will ever come into the mind, or be kept there, but by God. Hence, the object and use of prayer are to obtain this gracious influence. Prayer is the first step in the divine life, prayer is the second, prayer is the third; and indeed it is necessary through the whole Christian course. Awakened sinner, you must pray. You must find opportunity to be alone; you must cry mightily unto God; you must implore his aid; you must give up a portion of your sleep, if you can command no time in the day for prayer. In one sense, you should pray always. The spirit of prayer should dwell in you and never depart, and be continually leading you to ejaculatory petitions in the house and by the way, upon your bed and in your occupations; and this should be the subject of your petitions, that your impressions may not be permitted to die away, but go on to conversion. You may read books, consult friends, hear sermons, and make resolutions; but books, friends, sermons, and resolutions will all fail, if God do not give his Holy Spirit. It is very common for beginners to trust too much to means, and too little to God. If you will not, or even if you suppose you cannot, find time for private prayer, you may as well stop at once, and give up the pursuit of salvation; for you cannot be saved without it.

4. If you would retain your impressions and persevere in the pursuit of salvation, you must at once determine to give up whatever you know to be sinful in your conduct, and you must also be very watchful against sin. Thus runs the direction of the word of God: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call

ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." To the same effect is the language of one of Job's friends: "If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him; if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away." It is right for you at once to know, that the salvation which is in Christ is a deliverance from sin. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins," said the angel to Joseph, when he announced the approaching nativity of Christ, "who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." It is of immense consequence that you should at once have a distinct idea that the salvation you are beginning to seek is a holy calling. Whatever is sinful in your temper, such as malice, revenge, violent passions; or whatever is sinful in your words, in the way of falsehood, railing, backbiting; or whatever is sinful in your practice, in the way of sabbath-breaking, injustice, unkindness, undutifulness to parents or masters; must immediately be given up without hesitation, reluctance, or reserve. The retaining of one single sin, which you know to be such, will soon stifle your convictions, and efface all your impressions. If you are not willing to give up your sins, it is not salvation you are seeking. You may suppose you wish to become a Christian, and read the Bible, offer up prayers, and regularly hear sermons, and you wonder that you do not get on in religion; but perhaps the reason is, you are not willing to give up your sins, your worldly-mindedness, your

carnal pleasures, or some practice that you find to be gainful or agreeable, although you know it to be sinful. Well, then, you cannot get on in this state of mind. Do, do, therefore, look carefully within; examine faithfully your conduct, and see whether there be in you anything which you know to be wrong, but which you are nevertheless unwilling to abandon: if there is, it is vain for you to think of retaining your impressions, and becoming a Christian. And let me also remind you, that this willingness to give up your sins must be immediate; you must desire and propose an instant abandonment of sin. Augustine confesses that he used to pray to God to convert him, but with this reservation, "Lord, not yet." He wished to live a little longer in the gratification of his sinful lusts, before he was completely turned to the Lord from his evil ways. Thus there are some who are, or profess to be, desirous to be converted at some time or other, and who are willing to give up their sins, but "not yet." There is a mixture of feeling; a concern to be saved, but a lingering love of some sin; and the matter is settled by a resolution to sacrifice the sin at some future time. Awful delusion! God says, Now, and you must reply, Yes, Lord, now; I would now be converted from this and every sin.

And not only must you be willing to give up sin, but you must watch most carefully against it. You are in a most critical state of mind; and a very small indulgence of sin may put away all your religious feelings. Even the giving way to a bad temper may do irreparable mischief to your soul, and hinder your pursuit of eternal life. You ought especially to watch against your besetting sin, whatever it be, according to the exhortation

of the apostle. At the same time I would caution you against being discouraged by occasional failures; you are not to throw up all in despair because you are occasionally overcome by temptation. Instances of this kind should make you more watchful, but not desponding. I shall say more on this subject hereafter.

5. It is of great consequence for you to separate yourselves from irreligious or worldly companions. It will require some courage, and call for some painful self-denial, to retire from the society of those with whom you have been in the habit of associating; but if they are ungodly persons, it must be done. Read what God and good men have said on this subject. Psalm cxix, 63; Prov. i, 11–16; ii, 12–19; xxix, 6; xiii, 20; 1 Cor. xv, 33; 2 Cor. vi, 14–18. Comply with these admonitions, and quit the society of all who think lightly of religion. Their company and conversation will soon draw you aside from the ways of piety. Their levity, their indifference, their neglect of salvation, will be destructive to all your religious feelings. Even Christians of long standing and of deeply-rooted piety find such society very unfriendly to their religion, and avoid it as much as possible: how much more dangerous will it be to you, whose religion is yet so feeble and incapable of much opposition! Even if such companions do not attempt to laugh or reason you out of your concern for your soul, (which, however, they will be almost sure to do, and never cease till they have succeeded,) their very conversation and general disposition will wither your tender piety, as an east wind does the blossoms of spring. You must then give up either your sinful associates or your salvation; for if you cannot, or rather will not break off from such companions as are opposed

to religion, you may as well relinquish all hope of eternal life, since the preservation of pious feeling, and communion with the ungodly, are utterly incompatible with each other. Is there any companion on earth whose friendship you prefer to salvation, and whose loss you dread more than damnation?

6. It is transcendently important that you should use all those scriptural means which are calculated and intended to keep up a due sense of religion in the mind. These you must immediately and most earnestly employ: no time must be lost, no labour must be spared, no sacrifice must be grudged. Your soul and all her eternal interests are at stake. Hell is to be escaped; heaven is to be sought; Satan is to be conquered; salvation is to be obtained. Your enemies are numerous and mighty; your difficulties are immense, though not insurmountable. Every energy must be roused, every exertion must be made, every help called in, every lawful means employed. Read the following passages of God's word, and see if religion be a light and easy work. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able," "Labour for that meat which endureth unto eternal life," "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life," "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." What metaphors! What language! We might almost feel prompted to ask, Who then can be saved, if such anxiety, such effort be necessary? Even the righteous are scarcely saved. If you do not, like David, seek the favour of God with your whole heart, you will never have it. You may more

rationally think to reach the top of the highest mountain on earth without labour, than to imagine you can reach heaven without effort. If you suppose a few wishes or a little exertion will do, you mistake; and the sooner you are undeceived the better. But I will now specify the means you should use.

Immediately commence the devout and diligent perusal of the Scriptures. "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." The Bible is the food of the soul, even as the mother's milk is the nourishment of the child; and you may as easily believe that the infant will grow without food, as that you will grow in knowledge of grace without the Scriptures. Read both for instruction and for impression; read attentively, and with meditation; pause and ponder as you go along. Neglect not the book of God for the books of men: the latter may be read as the interpreters, but not as the substitutes of the former. If you do not find the Bible so interesting to you at first as you expected and wished, still go on; it will grow upon acquaintance. Nothing is so likely to keep up and to deepen religious impressions, as the serious perusal of the Scriptures; they are the very element of devotion. Of two inquirers after salvation, he will be most likely to persevere and to grow in piety, who is most diligent in reading the word of God. Do not be disheartened by finding much that you cannot at present understand; there is much that you can understand. Read in course, but instead of beginning the Bible, and going regularly through it, take the Psalms, the Gospels, and the Epistles, and make these the first portion of your study.

Attend with regularity and seriousness upon the

preaching of the gospel. Sermons are invaluable helps to the anxious inquirer. Hear the word preached, with a deep conviction that it will do you no good but as God blesses it, and therefore look above the minister to God. Pray before you go to hear sermons; pray while you hear; and pray after you have heard. Go from the closet of private prayer to the place of public worship, and from the place of public worship back again to prayer. Apply the word as you hear it to yourself; hear with attention, hear as for yourself, hear as for salvation. Avoid a light and careless way of attending upon the means of grace. Grow not sinfully familiar with sacred things. Avoid general conversation after sermons; and gratify not those evil spirits who desire to steal away the good seed of the word from the hearts in which it has been sown.

If you have the opportunity, avail yourselves of the advantages of social prayer. The prayers of good men are like gentle breezes to fan the spark of piety in the young convert's heart, and to surround him with the atmosphere of devotion. In these meetings you will be prayed with and prayed for: you will hear what more advanced Christians feel and desire, and their prayers are some of the best instructions you can receive: thus you will have your hearts knit together in love with the people of God.

You should seek the instructions and counsels of some pious friend, with whom you should be free and full in laying open the state of your mind. Frequent the company of the righteous, and at once identify yourself with them. You must not be ashamed to let your attachment to his cause and your adherence to his people be openly known. Many persons wish to come

and make secret peace with God, because fear, or pride, or interest, remonstrates against an open admission of his claims. They keep their convictions to themselves, and hence they sometimes soon die away for want of support.

But it is especially desirable, that you should make known your mind to your minister. Go, without delay, to him. Perhaps he has meetings for inquirers, and even if he has not, he will no doubt be glad to hear your account of yourselves, and will tenderly sympathize with you under your anxieties. If he be like his Divine Master, he will "gather the lambs of the flock in his arms, carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young." Be not afraid to go to him: if you are timid, and unable to say much, he will understand your broken hints, kindly elicit your sentiments and feelings, and give you suitable instruction and encouragement. One half-hour's conversation with a skilful physician of souls will often do more to assist you in this first stage of your religious history, than the reading of many books, and the hearing of many sermons.

Remember, however, after all there is a danger of depending too much upon means, as well as of too much neglecting them. Forget not what I have said concerning the work of the Spirit of God. He is your Helper, neither friends nor minister, neither reading nor hearing, no, nor the Bible itself, must lead you away from your dependence on the Holy Ghost. Many inquirers seem to have no hope or expectation of good but in connexion with certain means; if they are cut off from sermons even occasionally, or have not precisely

the same number and kind of ordinances they have been accustomed to, they are gloomy and desponding, fretful and peevish, and hence do not only get no good, but much harm by their unbelief and bad temper. We must depend upon God, and upon nothing but God, who could bless his people in the darkness of a dungeon, where the Bible could not be read, or in the solitude of a wilderness, where no gospel sermon could be heard.

It is of consequence that you should here distinctly understand, that the grace of God in your salvation is rich and free. Your exertions in seeking salvation do not merit or deserve it; and if you receive it, you will not have it granted to you as the reward of your own efforts to obtain it. To imagine that you can claim the grace that is necessary to your conversion, because you profess to seek it, is to follow the wretched example of those who, in ancient times, went "about to establish their own righteousness, and did not submit themselves unto the righteousness of God." Your deep convictions, impressions, and solicitude, your many tears, your earnest prayers, your diligent attendance upon sermons, and your partial reformations, can claim nothing in the way of reward from Him; nor is he bound to save you for that which has no reference to his glory: till you believe God's promise, he is under no obligation, even to himself, to save you. Notwithstanding all your concern, you lie at his mercy; and if you are saved, it is of pure favour.

Do not allow yourself to conclude, that your present concern is sure to end in the conversion of your soul to God. Nothing is more likely to deaden and even to

destroy religious impressions, than to infer that you are sure of being converted because you are anxious about it; facts are against such an inference. I have read of a gentleman, who felt, in a dangerous sickness, great horror at the review of his past life, and was advised to send for the minister of the parish, that he might set his mind at rest. The minister came. The gentleman told him that if God would be pleased to preserve him from death, his life should be the reverse of what it had been. He would regularly attend church; he would catechise his servants; he would regularly worship God in his family and in his closet; he would, in short, do everything a good Christian should do. His wishes were accomplished; he was thankful for his deliverance, and did not forget his promises. For many months he continued, as far as his conduct could be judged of by the world, to perform his vows. After a time, however, he thought so much religion superfluous. He first left off the duties of the closet and family; public duties at last became likewise too wearisome, and he became again the same man that he formerly was. After some time, he was again seized by a dangerous distemper, and was advised by his friends to send again for the minister, that he might afford fresh consolation to his wounded spirit. "No," said he, "after breaking all the promises that I made to God, I cannot expect mercy from him." Death found him in this unhappy state of mind, and carried him to that world where there are no changes. This story, with some variations of no consequence, may be told of myriads. Impressions are made upon the minds of sinners, which are attended with visible consequences,

that give rise to favourable hopes in the breasts of friends and ministers; but their hopes often prove illusions. "When the Lord slew the children of Israel, then they sought him; and they returned and inquired early after God: and they remembered that God had been their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer; nevertheless they flattered him with their mouths, and lied unto him with their tongues." They did not intentionally lie. They seem frequently to have been sincere at the time in their promises; not, indeed, with a godly sincerity: "yet their hearts were not right with God, neither were they stedfast in his covenant," and the reason why they were not stedfast in his covenant was, because, though they were impressed, their hearts were not right with God.

Perhaps there is no minister of the gospel who could not furnish some most affecting illustrations of the sentiment, that impressions and convictions do not always end in conversion. I began my own religious course with three companions, one of whom was materially serviceable, in some particulars, to myself; but he soon proved that his religion was nothing more than mere transient devotion. A second returned to his sin, "like a dog to his vomit, and a sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire." The third, who was for some time my intimate friend, imbibed the principles of infidelity; and so great was his zeal for his new creed, that he sat up at night to copy out Paine's "Age of Reason." After a while he was seized with a dangerous disease; his conscience awoke; the convictions of his mind were agonizing; his remorse was horrible. He ordered all his infidel extracts, that had cost him so

many nights to copy out, to be burnt before his face; and if not in words, yet in spirit,

> "Burn, burn," he cried, "in sacred rage,
> Hell is the due of every page."

His infidel companions and his infidel principles forsook him at once, and in the hearing of a pious friend who visited him, and to whom he confessed with tears and lamentations his backsliding, he uttered his confessions of sin, and his vows of repentance. He recovered; but, painful to relate, it was only to relapse again, if not into infidelity, yet at any rate into an utter disregard to religion.

These are awful instances, and prove by facts, which are unanswerable arguments, that it is but too certain that many seek to enter in at the strait gate, but do not accomplish their object. And why? Not because God is unwilling to save them, but because they rest in impressions, without going on to actual conversion. It is dangerous then, reader, as well as unwarranted, to conclude that you are sure to be saved. It is very true that where God has begun a good work he will carry it on to the day of Jesus Christ; but do not conclude too certainly that he has begun it. You may take encouragement from your present state of mind to hope that you will be saved; but that encouragement should rather come from what God has promised, and what God is, than from what you feel. To regard your present state of mind, therefore, with complacency; to conceive of it as preferring any claim upon God to convert you; to look upon it as affording a certainty that you will be ultimately converted, a kind of pledge

and earnest of salvation, instead of considering it only as struggles after salvation, which may or may not be successful, according as they are continued in a right manner; is the way to lose the impressions themselves, and to turn back again to sin or the world. The true light in which to consider your present solicitude is that of a state of mind which, if it terminate in genuine faith, and which it is probable it may, will end in your salvation: consequently, your object should be to cherish your anxiety, and seek the grace of Jehovah to give you sincere repentance towards God, and true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The subject of this chapter may be illustrated and enforced, by an extract from that admirable and most edifying book, "The Diary of Mr Joseph Williams, of Kidderminster." "About this time," he says, when speaking of his youthful days, "going with my father a few miles from home, his talk with me was very profitable. He exhorted me to serious religion now in my youth, as the season when the mind is most fit to receive good impressions. He cautioned me not to put off the grand concern to an uncertain hereafter. He pleaded with me, not only the uncertainty of life, but the improbability of my turning to God in old age, after vicious habits were grown strong by a long continuance in sin. To affect me the more, he gave me the following particulars of his conversation with a gentleman of his acquaintance. I was coming home, said he, one evening, from Bewdley, in company with Mr Radford and his son John. After he had related to me some particulars in his conduct, in vindicating some persecuted Christians against an unkind and illiberal attack,

he directed his discourse to his son. 'Son,' said he, 'though I have not myself been so religious and careful of my soul as I should have been, yet I cannot but have a tender concern for your everlasting happiness; and here, before Mr Williams, I admonish you not to live after my example. I have often advised you to make this man your associate, he will lead you in the way to heaven. You are got in with a knot of young fellows who will do you no good; but I charge you,' which he uttered with a louder voice, 'to leave off the company of such and such, and spend all the time you can in the company of this neighbour.' To which I replied, 'Sir, I am now full of business, and am much older than your son, therefore young men of his own age are more fit for him to associate with.' On my saying this, he stopped his horse, I being before him, and his son behind him; then, with great earnestness, he declared to him, 'I will not stir from this place until you have promised me to abandon that set of companions, and make this man your daily associate. Mind religion, religion in your youth; and do not do as I have done. I have slighted many convictions, and now my heart is hard and brawny.' I was in a manner thunderstruck with the old gentleman's last words; and though my father went on to relate more that he there uttered, and the promise his son made before he would stir a step further, yet my thoughts were wholly swallowed up in deep musing on these words, 'My heart is hard and brawny.' I had such an affecting sense of the old gentleman's dreadful state, that it engaged my mind all the rest of the way; and even while I was transacting business, it was uppermost; for his words were ever sound-

ing in my ears. Thus I was kept long in a very serious frame; and was possessed with a most alarming fear lest I should fall into such a state, which I considered as the greatest plague that could be inflicted on me. In this temper of mind I returned home, keeping my thoughts all the way intent upon the sad and solemn subject. While I was musing, the fire burned, my heart was hot within me, and, using a low voice, I kept up a serious soliloquy on the most important concerns of my soul; and the impressions did not wear off for a considerable time."*

* Williams' Diary, Mr Hanbury's enlarged edit. p. 8, 9.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF GAINING SCRIPTURAL KNOWLEDGE, AND CLEAR VIEWS OF DIVINE TRUTH.

THERE is scarcely any one point to which the attention of anxious inquirers should be more earnestly and carefully directed, than the necessity of an accurate understanding of the scheme of salvation, and the doctrines of the Scripture. You must endeavour to have clear ideas, correct views, precise and intelligent notions. The concern of many people is nothing more than an ignorant anxiety to be religious; they have scarcely one definite idea what religion is. Others are a little better informed than this, but still have no notion of piety, but as either a state of excited feeling, or a course of outward observances. It is important that you should perceive that the whole superstructure of personal godliness rests on knowledge. True conversion is emphatically called, "coming to the knowledge of the truth." Your impressions will be easily effaced, and your concern will soon subside, if you do not give yourself time, and use means to become acquainted with the truth. There is much to be learnt and known, as well as to be felt and done, and you cannot either feel or act aright, unless you do learn it. The reason why so many turn back, and others go on so slowly, is, because they do

not study to make themselves acquainted with Divine truth. Suppose a man were travelling through a strange country, could he get on without consulting his map? Would it be of any service to wish he could travel faster, and get on better, if he never looked at his book of roads? How can you get on in the way to heaven, without studying the Bible, which is the map of the road? Or, changing the illustration, suppose you were in pecuniary difficulties, and some friend had told you not only how to extricate yourself from your perplexities, but also how to acquire great wealth; and in order to guard you from error, had given you long written directions. What would you do? Sit down, and wish and long for success, and immediately set out in a great bustle to realize the promised advantages? No. You would say, "My success depends upon knowledge, upon my making myself accurately acquainted with the particulars of my friend's written directions. I will read them, therefore, with the greatest care, till I have every one of his ideas in my mind; for it is quite useless to exert myself, if I do not know how my exertions are to be directed." This you confess is quite rational; and is it not quite as necessary for you to be acquainted with the subject of religion, in order to be truly pious? Knowledge, knowledge, my friends, is indispensable. Religion is repentance towards God; but can you repent if you do not know the character of the God whom you have offended, the law you have broken, and the sin you have committed? Religion is faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; but can you really believe, if you do not know whom and what you are to believe? Religion is the love of God; but can you love a being whom you do not know? You must give yourself,

therefore, time and opportunity for reflection; you must bring your understanding to the business; you must study religion as a science to be known, as well as a passion to be felt, or a rule to be observed. It is of great consequence that, at this stage of your progress, you should clearly understand, that it is an obvious law of the human mind, that neither faith nor feeling of any kind can be produced by any other means than that of knowledge. Suppose you want to believe a person, or love him, or rejoice in him, can you work up yourself to do so unless you have some reason for it? No; you must know some grounds on which you can credit him, and some excellencies which render him worthy of your affection, and some facts which are a just cause of joy. No passion or affection can be called into exercise but by the knowledge of something that is calculated to excite it. You may try as long as you please to work upon your mind otherwise, but the thing is manifestly impossible. Hence, then, the importance of growing in knowledge of Divine things. The way to have your faith increased, is to increase in the knowledge of what is to be believed: and if you would be rooted and grounded in love, you must be first rooted and grounded in the knowledge of what you are to love. The order of nature is, first to know, then to feel, then to act; and grace follows the order of nature. I deduce, therefore, this inference, that in the whole business of religion, the eye of the inquirer must be much fixed on objects out of himself, on those that are presented in the word of God. If you ask what are the subjects which you should endeavour to understand, I place before you the following:

1. The moral character of God. The knowledge of God is the basis of religion. God is a Spirit, as to his nature; almighty, all-knowing, and everywhere present; searching the hearts and trying the reins of the children of men. As to his moral attributes, it is said, "God is love," and "God is light;" by which we are to understand, that he is both benevolent and holy. Yes; so holy, that the very heavens are unclean before him. He is also so inflexibly just, as to be compelled, by the infinite perfection of his nature, to reveal his wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; and, at the same time, he is a God that cannot lie, but will fulfil every word of promise or threatening. Oh, my reader, dwell upon this view of the divine character; infinite hatred and opposition to sin; infinite purity, immutable justice, inviolable truth. Pause and ponder: but canst thou lift up thine eyes, and bear the sight when the cherubim veil their faces with their wings, as they stand before the great white throne, and say one to another, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts;" when the prophet filled with terror, fell prostrate, exclaiming, "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips?" Oh the deep depravity, the utter sinfulness of man before this holy God!

2. You must understand the law, I mean the law of the ten commandments; the moral law. You must know the spirituality of the law, by which I mean, that it demands the obedience of the mind and heart; and is made for the soul's innermost recesses, as well as for the actions of the life. God sees and searches the mind, and therefore demands the perfect obedience of the heart, and forbids its evil dispositions. By the law

of God, as interpreted by Christ, even sinful anger is murder, and unchaste thoughts are adultery. The law demands from every human being sinless, perfect obedience, from the beginning to the end of life, in thought, word, and deed; it abates nothing of its demands, and makes no allowances for human weakness, Matt. v, 17–48; James ii, 10, 11. The perfection of the law is a tremendous subject, it is an awful mirror for a sinful creature to look into. You must also understand the design of the law; it is not given to save us, but to govern us and condemn us; to show us what sin is, and to condemn us for committing it, Rom. iii, 20; Gal. iii, 10. You can know nothing if you do not know the law. "Sin is the transgression of the law;" but how can you know sin if you do not know the law? Oh, inquirer, how many, how great are thy transgressions, if every departure from this law, in feeling as well as in action, is a sin! Nor is this all; for to fall short of the law is sin, no less than to oppose it. Read what our Lord has said; "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Alarming representation! Hast thou thus loved God, and thy neighbour? Confounding and overwhelming question! What a state of sin have you been living in! Your whole life has been sin, for you have not loved God; and not to love God, is all sins in one. Who can think of greater sin than not loving God? To love the world, to love trifles, to love even sin and not to love God!

3. But this leads me to remark, that it is necessary you should understand the evil of sin. Men think little of sin: but does God? What turned Adam and Eve

out of paradise? Sin. What drowned the old world in the flood? Sin. What destroyed God's own city, and scattered his chosen people as vagrants over the face of the earth? Sin. What brought disease, accidents, toil, care, war, pestilence, and famine into the world? Sin. What has converted the world into one great burying-place of its inhabitants? Sin. What lighted the flames of hell? Sin. What crucified the Lord of life and glory? Sin. What then must sin be? Who but God, and what but his infinite mind, can conceive of its evil nature? Did you ever consider that it was only one sin that brought death and all our woes into the world? Do you not tremble, then, at the thought that this evil is in you? Some will attempt to persuade you that sin is a trifle; that God does not take much account of it; that you need not give yourself much concern about it. But what says God himself, in his word, in his providence, in the torments of the damned, in the crucifixion of his Son? You have not only sin enough in yourself to deserve the bottomless pit, and to sink you to it, unless it be pardoned; but sin enough, if it could be divided and distributed to others, to doom multitudes to perdition.

4. But it is not enough to know your actual sins, you must also clearly understand your original and inherent depravity of heart. There is the sin of your nature, as well as the sin of your conduct. Our Lord has told us that "those things which proceed out of the mouth, come forth from the heart, and they defile the man; for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." The heart is the polluted fountain from whence all the muddy streams of evil conduct flow.

The heart is the great storehouse of iniquity. Men sometimes make excuse for their evil deeds, by saying, that they have good hearts at bottom; this, however, is an awful mistake, for every man's heart, not excepting the most wicked, is really worse than his conduct. Why do not men seek, serve, and love God? Because the carnal mind is enmity against him. Why do sinners go on in sin? Because they love it in their hearts. This was not the original condition of man, for God created Adam in his own image; that is, in righteousness and true holiness; but, by disobeying God in eating the forbidden fruit, our first parent fell into a state of sin, and we, having descended from him, since the fall, inherit his corruption, Rom. v, 12–21. It is of vast consequence for you to know, that you are thus totally corrupt in your very nature, and through all your faculties; for without this knowledge you will be taken up with a mere outward reformation, to the neglect of an entire, inward renovation. If you saw a man, who had a bad and loathsome disease of the skin, merely applying outward lotions and fomentations, you would remind him, that the seat of the disorder was in his blood, and admonish him to purify that by medicine. You must first make the tree good, said our Lord, for good fruit cannot be borne by a bad tree. So your heart must be renewed, or you can never perform good works. You not only need the pardon of actual sin, but you need also the removal of original sin. You must have a new heart, a right spirit, or you cannot be saved. Read Psalm li; liii; John iii, 1–8; Gal. v, 19–25; Ephes. iv, 17–24.

5. You must endeavour at once to gain clear and distinct notions of the precise design of Christ's medi-

atorial office and work. All will be confusion in your ideas, and unrelieved distress in your souls, if you do not understand this subject. It is not enough to know in a general way, that Christ died to save sinners. Did it ever occur to you to ask the questions, Why did God save sinners in this way? Why was it necessary for his Son to become incarnate, suffer and die upon the cross, for their salvation? Why was it not enough that they should repent and reform, in order to their being pardoned? What precise end was to be accomplished by the death of Christ? I will show you this design as it relates to God. Is not God holy, and does he not abhor sin? Yes, with a perfect hatred. Is he not the righteous Governor of the universe, and has he not given a law, to which he demands perfect obedience; and has he not threatened death upon all who break this law? Certainly. Have not all men broken this law and incurred its penalty? Yes. Suppose, then, that upon the sinner's repentance, admitting that he were disposed to repent and reform, God were to receive him back to his favour; and suppose he was to do this in every case; where would be his truth in threatening to follow sin with punishment; and how would his holiness or hatred of sin appear, or his justice in punishing it? Would it not seem a light thing to sin against God; would not the law be destroyed, and God's moral government be set aside? Could any government, human or Divine, exist with an indiscriminate dispensation of pardon to all offenders upon their repentance? But you say perhaps, What is to be done? Is not repentance all that the sinner has to offer? I reply, Is repentance all that God is bound to require or accept? Besides, it is not all that the sinner has to give, for he can

also suffer the penalty. Convinced and anxious sinner, I put it to your own conscience and feelings, do you not begin to see the holiness of God and the evil of sin; and do you think you could ever be at rest, if you had nothing but repentance to offer? No, you have tried it. You have left off many sins, and begun many neglected duties; you have read, and prayed, and wept, and watched; but are you at peace? No, say you; as far from it as ever? Why? Because you know that God is true, and holy, and just, and yet you cannot see how he can be holy, true, and just, if your sins are forgiven upon your mere repentance and reformation. True; and your conscience will ever be as the sword of the cherubim, frightening and driving you back from God as long as you have nothing but tears, and prayers, and doings of your own to bring. Yes, there is a testimony to God's holiness and justice in your conscience. But now, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." Read also other language of the same apostle. "He hath made him [Christ] to be sin [a sin offering] for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." The prophet Isaiah tells us, "The Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all." And the apostle Peter says, "He died, the just for [in place of] the unjust, to bring us to God."

So far as God is concerned, then, this is the precise design of Christ's death, not to render him merciful, for

the gift of Christ is the fruit of Divine love; but that he might appear what he is, a holy God in hating sin, a righteous God in punishing it, and a merciful God at the same time in forgiving it. The death of Christ is intended to be a display of holy love; that is, the union of abhorrence to the sin and compassion to the sinner; the union of a just regard to his own character, law, and government, and a merciful regard to the sinful and miserable children of men. Take an illustration: Zaleucus, king of the Locrians, had promulgated a law to his subjects, threatening any one who should be guilty of the crime of adultery, with the loss of his eyes. His own son was the first convicted under the law. The kingly and parental character seemed to struggle for predominance: if the prince be pardoned, what became of the law? if he be punished, how great a calamity would the father endure in the affliction of the son! What was to be done? The father determined that he would lose one of his eyes, and the son one of his. It was done. Here was punishment and pardon united. Atonement was made to the offended law, as effectually as if the son had been reduced to total blindness. The letter of the law was not complied with, but the spirit of it was exceeded. The case is not adduced as a perfect parallel to the atonement of Christ, but simply as an illustration of its principles, as tending to show that atonement may be as effectually made by substitution, as by the suffering of the real offender.

Anxious sinner, dwell upon the statement of Christ; there is thy hope, thy joy, thy life. Behold the Lamb of God bearing the sins of the world, and thine among the rest. Think of the dignity of the Sufferer, the extremity of his sufferings, and the consequences of his

mediation. Could the law ever be more honoured than by the obedience of such a Person? Could justice be more displayed even by the everlasting punishment of all the human race? Tremble not to approach God through Christ. He has made provision for the manifestation of his own glory, as well as for the salvation of thy soul. God is upon a throne of grace: the blood of atonement has been shed and sprinkled; the hand of mercy holds forth the blessing of salvation: fix thine eye upon Jesus the Mediator; rest all thy hope upon his sacrifice; plead his atonement, and then life eternal is thine.

6. But you must also be instructed in the design of Christ's death in reference to yourself. This is immensely important; it is often but partially understood by the inquirer, amidst the throbbing solicitude of his spirit, and the first alarms of conscious guilt. With the avenger of blood pursuing him, he is apt to think of little else than safety from vengeance. But there is another enemy he has to fear besides hell, and that is sin; and could he be delivered from hell, without being delivered from sin, he would find no heaven. When man was created, he was created holy, and consequently happy. He was not only placed in a paradise which was without sin, but he was blessed with a paradise within him. His perfect holiness was as much the Eden of his soul, as the garden which he tilled was the Eden of his bodily senses: it was in the inward paradise of a holy mind that he walked in communion with God. The fall cast him out of this heaven upon earth; his understanding became darkened, his heart corrupted, his will perverted, and his disposition earthly, sensual, and devilish. Not only was his conscience laden

with guilt, but, as a necessary consequence, his imagination was full of terror and dread of that holy God, whose voice and presence formerly imparted nothing but transport to his soul. He was afraid of God, and unfit for him. His whole soul became the seat of fleshly appetites and irregular passions. In his innocence he had loved God supremely, and his companion as himself. He had been united to God by a feeling of dependence and devotedness, and to his fellow-creature, by a principle of hallowed sympathy. But now he was cut off from both these feelings, and came under the domination of an absorbing and engrossing selfishness. Such is the character he has transmitted, by ordinary generation, to all his posterity; they are not only guilty, but depraved; not only under the wrath of God, but despoiled of his image; not only condemned by God, but alienated from him.

Hence, then, the design of the death of Christ is not only to deliver us from the penal, but also from the polluting, consequences of sin. True it is, that hell will be some place set apart for the wicked, where the justice of God will consign them to the misery which their sins have deserved: but what is that misery? An eternal abandonment of them to themselves, with all their vices in full maturity: so that hell is not only the wrath of God suffered, but that wrath coupled with its effect, an eternal endurance of all the tyranny of sin. Now the death of Christ is intended as a deliverance from the power of sin. "His name is Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins;" not in them. "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." "Christ loved the church, and

gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it, with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." And hence it is said to be the profession of believers in their baptism, to be under obligation to a conformity to the ends and designs of Christ's death. Do then, my dear friends, take up at once right views of the design of the work of Christ. You are to look to him for salvation: but what is salvation? Not only pardon; not only absolution from punishment; not merely deliverance from the bottomless pit; these blessings are, I admit, a part, but they are only a part of it: salvation means the crucifixion of your flesh, with its affections and lusts; the mortification of your corrupt nature. The salvation which the gospel offers is not only a future deliverance from hell, but a present deliverance from sin: not only a rescue from punishment, but a restoration to favour; a restoration not only to the favour of God, but also to his image. Christ died to raise you to the seat of Adam before his fall, that is, to a holy state. The end of all God's dealings in a way of mercy to the sinner, is to restore the dominion of holy principles in his nature: the whole manifestation of holy love in the gospel, is designed to change the stubborn, selfish, worldly, wicked heart of the fallen creature, into its own likeness; and thus by making him a partaker of the Divine nature, to fit him for communion with God.

Now let every anxious inquirer consider this; let him ask what it is he wants, as a fallen, sinful creature. Is it not the deliverance of his soul from the power as well as the punishment of sin? Is he not painfully

conscious to himself, not only of wrath coming down upon him from God for his sins, but of a spring of misery within himself in the existence of those very sins? And is it not for this he should look to Christ? Could he be saved at all, if not saved from his body of flesh, his corrupt nature? And can any one save him from this but Christ? Poor troubled tormented sinner, look to Christ; in him is all you want: the Son of God will be "made unto you wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

7. Connected with this is the momentous subject of the justification of a sinner in the sight of God. You must soon be at the bar of God for judgment, and if you are not justified now, you must be condemned then. Yes, if you are not yet justified, which it is to be presumed you are not, you are now in a state of condemnation: "for he that believeth not is condemned already; the wrath of God abideth on him." Every one who has not yet received Christ is under the curse of the law; he is a dead man in law, a sinner doomed to die; condemned by God, condemned to death eternal. Well may you tremble at your situation; and like the man, who, after condemnation at the bar of his country's justice, has been removed to await in his cell the execution of his sentence, ask the question, "How shall I escape?" At this stage of your experience, then, it is infinitely desirable you should be clearly instructed in the nature of justification. It is a subject of immense consequence to the sinner, and is therefore frequently mentioned, and treated at great length in the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians. Attend to the meaning of the word. Justification is the opposite of condemnation, as is evident from the following passages: "He

that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord." "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect. It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" Fix this simple idea in your mind, that justification is the opposite of condemnation, for things are sometimes easily and impressively learnt by their contraries. The justification of an innocent person is pronouncing him just, on the ground of his own conduct; but how can a sinner, who is confessedly guilty of innumerable transgressions, be justified? Now you will see at once that the term, in reference to him, is a little different, and signifies, not that he is righteous in himself, but is treated as if he had been, through the righteousness of Christ imputed to him. "Justification," says the Assembly's larger Catechism, "is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight, not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone." In justification, God acts as a judge, in absolving the sinner from punishment, and restoring him to all the privileges of a citizen of the heavenly community.

Justification means not merely pardon, but something more. Pardon would only restore the sinner to the state of Adam before he fell, when he was not yet entitled to the reward of obedience, which, indeed, he never obtained. Justification is pardon connected with a title to eternal life. Justification takes place but once; pardon may be frequently repeated: justification is that great change which is made in the sinner's rela-

tion to God, when he is delivered from condemnation, and is brought, from being an enemy, to be a child. If a king were to save a condemned criminal, and immediately adopt him as a child, this would resemble justification; and his frequent forgiveness of his after offences, when standing in the relation of a son, would resemble God's fatherly love in forgiving the sins of his children. Justification, then, is God's act in taking off the sentence of a sinner's condemnation by the law, restoring him to his favour, and granting him a title to eternal life in heaven.

But how can a righteous God, who has respect for his holy law, justify a sinner? I answer, on the ground of Christ's righteousness. The law is thus honoured, because justification proceeds on the ground of a righteousness which meets and satisfies its demands. This is what is meant by the imputed righteousness of Christ, that the sinner is accepted to the Divine favour out of regard to what Christ did and suffered on his behalf. This judicial act of God, in justifying the sinner, takes place when and as soon as he believes in Christ; because by that act of faith he is brought into union with the Saviour, and becomes legally one with him, so as to receive the benefit of his mediatorial undertaking.

In connexion with this, it may be well to show the nature of sanctification, and how these two blessings are related to each other. Sanctification signifies our being set apart from the love and service of sin and the world, to the love and service of God; it is our being made holy; and a saint, or a sanctified person, means a holy one. Justification is the result of Christ's work for us; sanctification is the Holy Spirit's work in us. Conceive of a criminal in jail under sentence of death,

and at the same time infected with a dangerous disease; in order to his being saved, he must be both pardoned and cured: for if he be only pardoned, he will soon die of his disease; and if he be only cured, he will soon be executed. Such is the emblem of the sinner's case; by actual sin he is condemned to die, by inherent depravity he is infected with a spiritual disease: in justification he is pardoned; in sanctification he is cured; and the two blessings, although distinct, are always united, and are both necessary to salvation. Thus you see justification changes our relation to God, but sanctification changes our spiritual condition; and regeneration, or the new birth, means our first entrance upon a sanctified state.

Reader, diligently attend to these things; fix your mind upon them; labour to understand them: a knowledge of these two blessings, justification and sanctification, is a key to the whole Bible. Oh blessed, infinitely blessed state! to be delivered from the condemnation of our sins, and from their domineering and defiling power! this is a present salvation.

8. You should also be well instructed in the nature and necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit in renewing and sanctifying the sinner's heart. It is an important lesson, and one that should be learnt at the very beginning of your religious course, that the work of the Holy Spirit in the sinner is as necessary to his salvation as the work of Christ for him. As we are all corrupt by nature, in consequence of our descent from Adam since his fall, we grow up and remain without any true religion, till it is implanted in the heart by Divine grace: true holiness is something foreign to our corrupt nature; and the whole business of religion, from first

to last, is carried on in the heart by the Spirit of God. There is not, as I before remarked, and now repeat, a truly pious thought, feeling, purpose, word, or action, but is the result of Divine influence upon the human mind. Our regeneration, or new birth, is ascribed to the Spirit: hence it is said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Our right knowledge of God's word is traced up to the Spirit; hence David prayed, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Paul also prayed for the illumination of the Spirit, on behalf of the Ephesians, i. 17, 18. Sanctification is entirely the work of the Spirit; see 2 Thess ii. 13; 1 Pet. i. 2. Believers are said to "live in the Spirit:" "to walk in the Spirit;" "to walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;" "to be led by the Spirit;" "to mortify the deeds of the body by the Spirit;" "to be sealed by the Spirit;" "to have the Spirit bearing witness with their spirit that they are the children of God;" "to enjoy the earnest of the Spirit;" and to "bring forth the fruits of the Spirit." Now from all these passages, and many more that might be quoted, it is evident that the work of genuine religion is, from first to last, carried on in the soul by the Holy Ghost: this is his department, so to speak, in the economy of our redemption. The Father is represented as originating the scheme; the Son as executing it; the Spirit as applying it. But in order that your mind may not be perplexed, as is sometimes the case, by this doctrine, I will make one or two remarks on the subject of Divine influence.

The design of the Spirit's influence is not to give new mental faculties, but a proper exercise of those we

already possess. This great work is intended to create a new heart in the sinner, which means a new and holy disposition. Man by nature is so depraved that he cannot love God; that is, he is so desperately wicked, that he is not in a mind to love him, and never will be till God changes his mind.

The work of the Holy Spirit upon the mind is very mysterious, and we ought not to spend time in endeavouring to comprehend it, nor to indulge in any speculations about it. Our Lord declares it to be a great mystery, where he says to Nicodemus, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." We see the effects of the wind, but we cannot account for the changes in the atmosphere; so it is in the conversion of a sinner. It will greatly arrest the progress of the inquirer to engage in any speculations about this, or any other mystery of Divine truth.

The work of the Spirit is not intended to supersede the use of our faculties, but to direct them aright. He does not work without us, but by us: he does not change, and convert, and sanctify us, by leaving us idle spectators of the work, but by engaging us in it. Hence the admonition of the apostle to the Philippians: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." The exhortation, you perceive, does not say, Since it is God that worketh, there is nothing for you to do, and you may therefore sit still. No; on the contrary, it is, Do you work, for God works in you. God's working in us is a motive for our working. It is the breeze that wafts the ship along, but

then the mariner must hoist his sail to catch it: it is the rain and sunshine that cause the seed to germinate and grow, but the husbandman must plough and sow; for though the seed cannot grow without the influence of the heavens, so neither can it grow without the sowing of the husbandman.

We cannot usually distinguish between the influence of the Spirit and the operations of our own faculties, nor is it necessary we should. We cannot tell where man ends, and God begins, nor ought we to trouble or perplex ourselves about the matter. Hence, instead of waiting for any sensible or ascertainable impulse of the Spirit, either before we begin to attend to religion at all, or before we engage in any particular exercise of it, we are immediately to engage all our faculties in it, in a spirit of entire dependence upon God. We are to fix our attention, to deliberate, to purpose, to resolve, to choose, just as we should in worldly matters; but we are to do all this with a feeling of reliance, and in the very spirit of prayer. It is our obvious duty to repent and to believe, and also to do this at once, and not only merely to desire to do it, or attempt to do it: but such is the depravity of our nature, that we never shall do it till God influences us. What we have to do, therefore, is immediately to obey the command to repent and believe; and to obey in the very language and feeling of that prayer, "Lord, help mine unbelief." We must obey, not only believing that it is our duty to obey, but believing also that we shall be assisted to obey. Hence the very essence of religion seems to be a spirit of vigorous exertion, blended with a spirit of unlimited dependence and earnest prayer. An illustration may

be borrowed from the case of the man with the withered arm, as recorded Matthew xii. 10–13. Our Lord commanded him to stretch forth his hand, and he did not say, Lord, I cannot, it is dead; but, relying on His power who gave the injunction, and believing that the command implied a promise of help, if he were willing to receive it, he stretched it forth; that is, he willed to do it, and he was able. So it must be with the sinner; he is commanded to repent and believe, and he is not to say, I cannot for I am dead in sin; but he is to believe in the promised aid of grace, and to obey in a dependence upon Him, who worketh in men to will and to do.

CHAPTER IV.

ON REPENTANCE.

"EXCEPT ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Such was the awful and tremendous denunciation of our Lord, to those Jews who were at that time listening to his discourse. And except you repent, my reader, you will perish; perish body and soul in the bottomless pit, and perish everlastingly. There is a world of misery in that word, perish; it is deep as hell, broad as infinity, and long as eternity. None can comprehend its meaning but lost souls; and they are ever discovering in it some new mystery of torment. This misery will be yours, unless you repent. Tremble at the thought, and pray to Him who was exalted "to give repentance" as well as "remission of sins," that he would confer this grace upon you. But what is it to repent? It is more, much more than mere sorrow for sin: this is evident from what the apostle has remarked; "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of." True sorrow for sin is a part, and only a part, of repentance; for the scripture just quoted evidently makes a distinction between them. If sorrow comprised the whole of repentance, Cain, Ahab, and Judas repented; and hell itself is full of penitents, for there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth

for ever. Many, very many, grieve for their sins, who never repent of them. Men may grieve for the consequences of their sins, without mourning for the sins themselves. The meaning of the word repent, generally used in the Greek Scriptures, is a change of mind. Repentance, therefore, signifies an entire change of men's views, disposition, and conduct, with respect to sin. It is equivalent in meaning to regeneration. The new birth means a change of heart, and repentance is that same change viewed in reference to sin. The author of repentance is the Holy Ghost; it is the effect of Divine grace working in the heart of man. The following things are included in true repentance.

1. Conviction of sin. "When he [the Spirit] is come," said Christ, "he shall reprove [that is, convince] the world of sin." The true penitent has a clear view of his state before God as a guilty and depraved creature. All men say they are sinners, the penitent knows it; they talk of it, he feels it; they have heard it from others, and taken it up as an opinion; he has learnt it by the teaching of God, who has shown him the purity of the law, and the wickedness of his own conduct and heart, as opposed to the law. He has looked into that bright and faithful mirror, and has seen his exceeding sinfulness. He perceives that he has lived without God, for he has not loved, and served, and glorified him. This in his view is sin, his not loving and serving God. He may not have been profligate, but he has lived without God; and if he has been openly vicious, his want of love to God has been the parent vice. He sees that all his worldly-mindedness, folly, and wickedness, have sprung from a depraved heart; a heart alienated from God. He formerly

thought he was not quite as he ought to be, but now he perceives that he has been altogether what he ought not to be; formerly he knew matters were not quite right, but he now sees they were all wrong; then he was of opinion he had no very strong claim upon God's justice or even mercy, but now he perceives clearly that he has been so great a sinner, that God would have been just had he cast him into hell. This is now his confession.

> "Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
> I must pronounce Thee just in death;
> And if my soul were sent to hell,
> Thy righteous law approves it well."

Can you subscribe to this, reader? if not, you are not yet convinced of sin as you must be. No man knows what sin is, and how sinful he is, who does not clearly see that he has deserved to be cast into "the lake that burneth with fire."

2. Self-condemnation is implied in true repentance. As long as a person indulges a self-justifying spirit, and is disposed, if not to defend his sins, yet to excuse them, he is not truly penitent, he is not indeed convinced of sin. To frame excuses for sin, and to take refuge from the voice of accusation and the stings of conscience, in circumstances of palliation, is the besetting infirmity of human nature, which first showed itself in our fallen parents, when the man threw the blame upon the woman, and the woman upon the serpent; and it has since continued to show itself in all their descendants. We very commonly hear those who have been recently led to see their sins, mitigating their guilt; one by pleading the peculiarity of his situation; another his constitution; a third the strength of the temptation;

a fourth imputes his actual sins to his original sin, and endeavours, on this ground, to lessen his sense of guilt. But there is no true repentance while this frame of mind lasts. No, never till the sinner has cast aside all excuses, rejected all pleas of extenuation, and abandoned all desire of self-justification; never till he is brought to take the whole blame upon himself; never till he pronounces his own sentence of condemnation; never is he truly penitent till his mouth is stopped as to excuse, and he is brought unfeignedly and contritely to exclaim, Guilty, guilty. Some such as this is now his sincere confession: "O thou injured Sovereign, thou all-holy God, and all-righteous Judge, I can attempt to excuse myself no longer. I stand before thee a convicted, self-condemned sinner. What has my life been but a course of rebellion against thee? It is not this or that action alone I have to lament. My whole soul has been disordered and depraved. All my thoughts, my affections, my desires, my pursuits, have been alienated from thee. I have not loved thee, thou God of holy love. Oh what a heart have I carried in my bosom, that could love the world, love my friends, love trifles, yea, love sin, but could not love thee! Particular sins do not so much oppress me, as this awful, horrid state of my carnal mind at enmity against thee. Oh what patience was it that thou didst not crush the poor feeble creature that had no virtue to love thee, and no power to resist thee! My whole life has been one continued state of sin; what seemed good was done from no good motive; for it was not done out of obedience or love to thee, and with no intention to please or to glorify thee. Once I thought as little of my

sin, as I thought of the gracious and righteous God against whom it was committed: and even when the knowledge of sin began to glimmer on the dark horizon of my guilty soul, how perversely did I resist the light, and how deceitfully, wickedly, and presumptuously, did I attempt to stand up in judgment with thee, and in proud self-confidence to plead my own cause. Oh with what lying excuses, and with what extenuations, did I make my wickedness more wicked, and tempt thy vengeance, and seek to draw thy thunderbolts upon my devoted head! Eternal thanks for thy marvellous long-suffering, and thy matchless grace, in not only bearing with my provocations, but convincing me of my folly. Stripped of all my pleas, silent as to every excuse, I cast myself before thee, uttering only that one confession, Guilty, guilty; and uttering only that one cry, Mercy, mercy."

3. Repentance includes sorrow for sin. If a man does not mourn for sin, he cannot repent of it. The apostle speaks of "godly sorrow," and the psalmist exemplifies it in the fifty-first psalm. Awakened and anxious sinner, I commend to thine especial attention that affecting and precious effusion of David's contrition. Read it often; read it upon thy knees in thy closet; read it as thy own prayer; read it till thy heart responds a sigh to every groan with which each verse is still vocal. With those melting strains of a broken heart sounding in thy ears, review the history of thy life, and the dark and winding course of thy rebellion against God. Pause and ponder as thou tracest back thy steps, in each scene of thy transgression, and God's patience. Dwell upon the length of thy term of sin, and all the

aggravations of that sin arising from religious advantages, pious friends, and a reproving conscience. Assail thy hard heart with motives to contrition, fetched from every view of God's mercy and thy own ingratitude; nor cease to smite the rock till the waters of penitence gush forth. Nor let thy sorrow be selfish; mourn more for thy sins as committed against God, than against thyself. Turn again to the fifty-first psalm, and see how David felt: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." Wonderful language! What views of sin were then in his mind; and, oh! what views of God! He had seduced Bathsheba into the greatest sin a wife can commit; he had murdered her husband; and had thus committed two of the most enormous evils against the well-being of society, and yet so impressed was he with a sense of his sin as committed against God, that he could now think only upon this. "Against thee, thou holy, holy, holy Lord God, have I sinned. Against thee, my Benefactor, who didst raise me from the sheepfold to be the governor of thy people. Oh, this is the crimson hue of my offence; this is the sting of my remorse; this is the wormwood and the gall of the cup of bitterness I now drink. Thou art willing to forgive me, and the thought of thy mercy blackens my crime, and deepens my self-abhorrence." This is godly sorrow; a grief for sin as sin, and as committed against so holy and gracious a God, and not merely a grief for the mischief we have done to ourselves. Godly sorrow grieves for those sins which God only knows; for those sins which it knows he will forgive, yea, which it is assured he has forgiven; and this is the test of genuine contrition. Do we mourn for sin as sin, or only for fear of punishment?

4. Repentance includes hatred of sin, forsaking it, and a determination not to repeat it. No man can truly repent of an act without a feeling of dislike to that act; the two cannot be separated, yea, they are the same thing. Reformation produced by penitence is repentance. A person stung by a serpent will not caress the reptile while he bathes the wounds he has inflicted with the tears of sorrow: no, he will destroy the viper, or flee from him, and will ever after be inspired with fresh terror and dislike of the whole serpent race. The penitent regards sin as the viper that has stung him, and will ever after hate it, dread it, and watch against it. Practices that before were delighted in will be abhorred and shunned; and instead of trying how near he may come to them without committing them, or how many things he may do that are like them, without doing the very things, he will try how far he can retire from them, and how entirely he may avoid the very appearance of evil. Will the serpent-bitten man try how near he can approach the rattle-snake without being stung again, or will he fondle like reptiles, even though they may be without venom? No. Observe how repentance wrought in the members of the Corinthian church: "For behold this self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves; yea, what indignation; yea, what fear; yea, what vehement desire; yea, what zeal; yea, what revenge."

Such is repentance.

But it is important to guard the inquirer against some perplexities with which many are very apt to trouble themselves on this subject.

You are not to suppose that you do not repent,

because you have never been the subject of overwhelming terror and excessive grief. Persons in the first stages of religious impression are sometimes cast down and discouraged, because they do not feel those agonizing and terrifying convictions, that some, whom they have heard or read of, have experienced. Others, again, are greatly troubled because they do not and cannot shed tears and utter groans, under a sense of sin, as some do. If they could either be wrought up to terror, or melted into weeping, they should then take some comfort, and have some hope, that their convictions were genuine. Now it is very probable that you, reader, have these fears, and are labouring under some mistakes as the ground of them.

It may be, that this longing after great terror or deeper grief may spring from a wrong motive. If you possessed these feelings, you would be comforted, and have hope, you think: yes, and thus by looking to your own feelings for comfort, make a saviour of your experience, instead of Christ, as I fear many do. "Oh!" say some, or if they do not say it, they feel it, "now I have had such deep convictions, and such meltings of heart, I think I may hope." But is not this putting their feelings in the place of the work of Christ? If you could endure for a while the torments of hell in your conscience, and shed all the tears of all the penitents in the world, they would not save you; and to take comfort and hope from these things will be resting on a sandy foundation. But, perhaps, you think this deep experience would be a stronger ground of confidence to go to Christ. Is not his own word, then, a sufficient warrant? Do you want any other warrant, or

can you have any other? Is not his invitation and promise enough? What can your feelings add to this? In some cases, there is pride at the bottom of this longing after terror and distress: the person who covets it wishes to be distinguished among Christians for his deep experience and great attainments; or he may wish to have something of his own to dwell upon with pleasure, a something that shall embolden him in his approach to God; it is, in fact, a subtle species of self-righteousness, a looking to inward feelings, if not to good works, as something to depend upon, and to glory in before God.

This anxiety may arise also from a partial and incorrect view of the nature of real religion. True religion is not a matter of mere feeling and strong emotion, but a matter of judgment, conscience, and practical principle. You must recollect that the minds of men are variously constituted as regards susceptibility of emotion. Some persons are possessed of far livelier feelings than others, and are far more easily moved; we see this in the common subjects of life as well as in religion. One man feels as truly the affection of love for his wife and children as another whose love is more vehement, though he may not fondle, caress, and talk of them so much: he may not even suffer those paroxysms of alarm when anything ails them, nor of frantic grief when they are taken from him; but he loves them so as to prefer them to all others, to labour for them, to make sacrifices for their comfort, and really to grieve when they are removed. His love and grief are as sincere and practical, though they are not boisterous, passionate, and noisy: his principle of attachment is as strong,

if his passion be not so ardent. Passion depends on constitutional temperament, but principle does not. Mere emotion, therefore, whether in religion or other matters, is no test of the genuineness of affection. Do not then, my reader, be troubled at this matter; your religion is not to be tried by the number of tears you shed, or the degree of terror you feel, or the measure of excitement to which you are wrought up; there may be much of all this where there is not true repentance, and there may be little of it where there is. Are you clearly instructed in the knowledge of God's holy nature and perfect law, so as distinctly to perceive, and really to feel, and frankly to confess, your numberless sins of conduct and deep depravity of heart? Do you truly admit your just desert of that curse which your sins have brought upon you? Do you cast away all excuses, and take the whole blame of your sins upon yourself? Do you really mourn for your sins, although you may shed few tears or utter few broken groans? Do you confess your sins to God without reserve, as well as without excuse? Do you truly hate sin, and abhor yourself on account of sin? Do you feel a repugnance to sin, a watchfulness against it, a dread of it in the least offences? Are you possessed of a new and growing tenderness of conscience with respect to sin? Then you are partakers of true repentance, although you may not be the subjects of those violent emotions, either of terror or of grief, which some have experienced.

I do not for a moment mean to throw suspicion upon the experience of those who have been called to pass through a state of conviction, which, on account of its terrific alarms and unutterable anguish, may be called

the valley of the shadow of death. By no means. God has led some of his people, not only hard by the clouds and blackness, the thunders and earthquakes, the trumpet and awful words of Sinai, but almost by the very brink of the burning pit, within sight of its flames, and within sound of its wailings: but let no man covet such a road to glory; let no man think he has mistaken the road, because he has not witnessed these dreadful scenes in his way. All must pass by both mount Sinai and mount Calvary in the way to heaven, but the view of each of them is not so clear or so impressive to some as to others.

CHAPTER V.

ON FAITH.

Suppose a number of the subjects of a wise and good king were, without any just cause, to rebel against him, and take up arms to dethrone him, they would by that act forfeit their lives. But suppose that the sovereign, in clemency, is disposed to pardon them, and for that purpose, sends out a proclamation, declaring that all those who, before a fixed time, would come to him, lay down their arms, confess their offence, and sue for mercy, should be spared, and restored to all their privileges as citizens; but that all who should be found under arms, and did not come and cast themselves upon the mercy of their sovereign, should be put to death. What, in this case, is the state of mind and act required in those who would be saved? Faith. They must believe the proclamation to have been issued by the monarch, and that he will really fulfil his word; they must not only believe the edict itself, but they must confide in the monarch; this is faith in him. What is their warrant or encouragement to go to him? His proclamation of mercy, and that alone; and not any convictions or desires of their own. If any one of the rebels were desirous of returning, he would not say, "I am greatly encouraged and truly warranted to go and expect forgiveness, because I am very anxious to be forgiven;"

for his desire of pardon of itself, is no warrant to expect it; but he would say, "My sovereign has bade me return, and promised me pardon: I have his word, and I can trust him: I will go, therefore, and confidently expect mercy." He goes, and although he knows that he has forfeited his life and deserved death, and brought himself under condemnation; yet he is assured he shall be spared, because the King has promised it, and he trusts in his veracity. This is faith. Does his faith merit forgiveness? No, but it insures it. Can the man boast that his works have saved him? No: he is saved by grace, through faith. But suppose when he heard the proclamation of mercy, he was merely convinced of his sin, and in some measure sorry for it, and desired forgiveness, but did not go to his sovereign; suppose he were to say to himself, "I am afraid to go; the prince is powerful, being surrounded by his guards who could destroy me in a moment, and I have been such a ring-leader in the rebellion that I cannot hope for mercy, although I long for it, and would do anything to obtain it." The time of mercy expires; the man is taken with arms in his hands; and he is put to death. Does he deserve to die? Yes, twice over, first for his rebellion, and secondly for his unbelief. His want of faith, not his rebellion, was the actual cause of his death. His sin would have been pardoned, had he believed. His convictions, his sorrow, his tears, his desire after pardon, could not save him: he had insulted his sovereign afresh, by doubting his veracity, and disobeying his command.

Awakened sinner, take heed that this is not your case. It is the case of many. They are rebels against God, they are guilty of innumerable sins. "God so

loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Thus runs the proclamation of mercy: "Repent of sin, believe in Christ, expect salvation." Many do believe, and are saved: but others, and they are multitudes, get no further than conviction; they know they are sinners, they desire pardon, and seem even willing to forsake some of their sins; but they do not believe in Christ, they do not return to God by faith in his Son, indulging a confident hope of forgiveness: they are afraid to go, saying their sins are too great to be forgiven; or they are contented to remain in a state of conviction; or before they have trusted in Christ, and experienced a real change of heart through faith, some earthly object or other draws off their attention from the Saviour, and they sink into a state of carelessness, and gradually go back again into the world. You are never safe, reader, till you have faith. Whatever may have been your tears, convictions, prayers, or exercises of mind, you are under the sentence of the law, and exposed to the wrath of God till you believe. If death come upon you before you have faith, you will as certainly and as deservedly perish, as the rebel, who, though he had expressed his sorrow for his treason, had not come in and cast down his arms, and accepted the royal mercy. You are within the flood-mark of Divine vengeance till you have confided your soul to Christ. Can we be saved if we are not justified? No. But we are "justified by faith, and have peace with God." Can we be saved unless we are

the children of God? No. But we are "all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Can we be saved without sanctification? No. Then "our hearts are purified by faith." But the jailor at Philippi asked, with fear and trembling, the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" Paul replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." When our Lord sent out his disciples, he said unto them, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." It is also said in another place, "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son." See then the importance, the tremendous importance, of faith in Christ. It is the hinge on which salvation turns; it is that, without which all knowledge, and all impressions, and all convictions, and all duties, will leave us short of heaven at last. Fix it deeply in your mind, therefore, that faith is the saving grace; or, in other words, that it is the state of mind with which salvation is connected; being brought into this state, you would be saved though you died the next hour; and without it you would not be saved, even had you been for years under the deepest concern.

But you will probably wish to know a little more about this transcendently important state of mind; and I shall, therefore, set before you,

1. What you are to believe. Faith, in general, means a belief of whatever God has testified in his word; but faith in Christ means the belief of what the Scripture says of Him; of his person, offices, and work. You are to believe that he is "the Son of God;" "God manifest in the flesh;" God-man, Mediator: for how can a mere creature be your Saviour? In faith you commit your soul to the Lord Jesus. What! into the hands of a mere creature? The Divinity of Christ is thus not merely an article of faith, but enters also into the foundation of hope. You are required to believe in the doctrine of atonement; that Christ satisfied Divine justice for human guilt, having been a propitiation for our sins; and that now his sacrifice and righteousness are the only ground or foundation on which a sinner can be accepted and acquitted before God. You are to believe that all, however previously guilty and unworthy, are welcome to God for salvation, without any exception, or any difficulty whatever. You are to believe that God really loves the world, and is truly willing and waiting to save the chief of sinners, and that he therefore is benevolent to you: and thus, instead of dwelling in the idea of a mere general or universal love, you are to bring the matter home to yourself, and to believe that God has goodwill towards you, has given Christ to die for you; that you are a part of the world which God loved, and for which Christ died, and you are not to lose yourself in the crowd. You are not to consider the scheme of redemption for anybody, or for everybody, but yourself; but you are to give the whole

an individual bearing upon yourself. You are to say, "God is well disposed towards me; Christ is given for me; died for me as well as for others: I am invited; I shall be saved if I trust in Christ; and I am as welcome as any one to Christ." Faith is not a belief in your own personal religion, that is the assurance of hope; but it is a belief that God loves sinners, and that Christ died for sinners, and for you amongst the rest: it is not a belief that you are a real Christian, but that Christ is willing to give you all the blessings included in that term. It is the belief of something out of yourself, but still of something concerning yourself. The object of faith is the work of Christ for you, not the work of the Spirit in you. It is of great consequence you should attend to this, because many are apt to confound these things. If I promise a man alms, and he really believes what I say, and expects relief, I, in the act of promising him, am the object of his faith, and not the state of his own mind in the act of believing. If, therefore, you would have faith, or, possessing it, would have it strengthened, you must fix and keep your eye on the testimony of Christ, which you find in the gospel

2. I will now show you how you are to believe. But is this necessary? There is no mystery in faith when we speak of believing a fellow-creature. When the rebel is required to believe in the proclamation of mercy sent out by his sovereign, and to come and sue for pardon, or when the beggar is required to believe in the promise of a benefactor who has promised him relief, does it enter into his mind to ask how he is to believe? What, in each of these cases, does faith mean? A belief that the promise has been made, and a confidence in the person who made it that he will fulfil his word. Behold,

then, the whole mystery there is in faith! It is a belief that Christ really died for sinners; that all who depend upon him alone shall be saved; and a trust in him for salvation. Yes, it is, if we may substitute another word as explanatory of faith, trust in Christ. Faith, and confidence in Christ, are the same thing. "I know whom I have believed," says the apostle, "and am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed to him." Believing, being persuaded, and the act of committing, are the same act; they all mean faith. It is to rest upon the word and work of Christ for salvation; to depend upon his atonement and righteousness, and upon nothing else, for acceptance with God; and really to expect salvation, because he has promised it. If there be no expectation, there is no faith; for faith in a man's promise necessarily implies expectation of its fulfilment. This, then, is faith; looking for or expecting salvation for the sake of Christ's work alone, and because God has promised it. If you want another illustration, take the case of the serpent-bitten Israelites. The people who were stung were commanded to look on the brazen serpent. Those who really believed the promise, that such an act would be followed with healing, went out and looked at the appointed means of relief: their looking was their believing; and what did that look imply? Expectation. Those who did not look did not expect healing, and those who did look expected relief. If, therefore, you are not brought to expect salvation, you do not believe; for as soon as you really believed you would indulge the expectation of salvation. "Faith is the substance [or confident expectation] of things hoped for." Faith being the expectation of salvation for Christ's sake alone, and because he has promised it, it

may be said to be weak or strong in proportion as our expectation is more or less confident, and free from doubt and fears.

3. But when is a sinner to believe? Strange question! And yet one that it is necessary to answer, because it is sometimes asked. Suppose, when you promised alms to a poor starving beggar, or forgiveness to a person that had injured you, he were to ask, "When am I to believe your promise?" should you not feel some surprise at the question? The very nature of the case suggests the propriety and necessity of immediate faith. Your veracity is as great at that moment as it ever will be, and therefore demands instant confidence. Suppose the beggar were to say, "I do not yet sufficiently feel my poverty, to believe you now; but when I am more pinched with hunger, I will take you at your word and come." Would not this be exceedingly preposterous? And yet this is the very conduct of many persons in reference to Christ, and faith in him for salvation. They know that trust in him alone is necessary to salvation; that they must at length come to him; but they seem to regard it rather as an exercise or state of mind, to which they are to be brought at some future time, and by some means they know not how, than as a duty to be immediately performed. Their inward feeling is, a hope that they shall have faith some time or other, without ever imagining that they are required, at once and without delay, to commit their soul to Christ.

Reader, reflect upon this matter, this necessity of instantly believing. Are you now a sinner? You know you are. Can you do anything now or hereafter to save yourself? You know you cannot. Is Christ now a

Saviour, able and willing to save you now? You know he is. Will he be more able or willing to save you a month or a year hence, than he is at this moment? Certainly not. Does he say, "Come unto me, not now, but at some future time; believe me, but not yet; trust in me after a while?" You know he does not. Every invitation, every promise, every encouragement, relates to the present moment. The words of Scripture are, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. Come, for all things are ready. He is waiting to be gracious." What prevents you, why should not you, as you read this, believe in Christ? What, except your own unwillingness, hinders you from this moment trusting in the Lord Jesus for salvation? What now? you say, still startled at the idea of instantly taking to your anxious bosom the sweet and soothing hope of salvation. "Why not now?" I ask. "Would God," you are ready to say, "I could; for I have no peace of mind! I feel that I am a sinner, and yet am distressed, at times, that I do not feel this enough. I am agitated and perplexed, for I have no reason to hope my sins are forgiven. I cannot approach God as a reconciled Father; on the contrary, I am afraid of him, and fear, if I were to die, I should not meet him in peace."

Permit me here to remind you, that you never can be at peace till you have faith: peace is the fruit, and the first fruit of faith. Observe what the apostle has said: "In whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." It is said of the Philippian jailer, "he rejoiced, believing in God." You never can till you believe in Christ have settled

peace of mind, except it be a false peace; you are seeking it in various ways, and occasionally obtain a short pause in your solicitude, by prayer, by hearing sermons, by dwelling on what you suppose are evidences of your conversion, by fully purposing to leave off your sins, and to serve God more entirely. But notwithstanding all this, you are not in possession of settled comfort. Your joy is more like an occasional flash from a taper in a dark night, than a steady sunshine: so that sometimes you are ready to give up religion altogether, and turn back again to the world; for you seem to be as far from comfort as ever. But stop and ask this question, "Am I seeking peace in the right way? Have I ever yet really, fully, and entirely believed in Christ? Have I truly committed my soul to him, and expected salvation according to his promise?" No; for if you had, you would not be in your present state of agitation. What is to give peace to a sinner feeling the burden of guilt upon his conscience? What is to relieve him from his distress? Nothing but faith in Christ; not the faith itself, but the object which faith looks at, which is Christ. Many are saying, "If I did but know that I had faith, or if I could feel my faith stronger, I could then rejoice." But this is seeking peace in faith itself, instead of seeking it by faith in Christ. Faith is not our Saviour, but only the eye that looks to him, the foot that goes to him, the hand that receives him. Take an illustration: Imagine that when you were afflicted with some dangerous disease, and anxious for recovery; in the midst of your solicitude, and after trying all kinds of remedies without effect, a physician came in, and said, "I have brought you an infallible cure for your complaint; it has cured thousands, and will most

certainly cure you." What would be the effect of this communication upon you? Just according to the state of your mind in reference to the report which the physician gives of his medicine. If your anxiety about recovery, and your fear of not obtaining a cure, were greater than your faith, you would gain no peace; the want of confidence in the medicine would keep you in deep solicitude. But suppose you were to believe the statement of your medical friend, and had full confidence in the remedy, what then would be the effect of the report? You would immediately rejoice; you would not wait till you had taken the medicine, and till you felt yourself cured, before your solicitude was relieved; no, but as soon as you believed in the efficacy of the remedy, you would say, "Joyful news! I am to be healed and restored to health." Now what in that case would relieve you from your solicitude, and give you comfort? The statement of your friend, or, in other words, faith in that statement. The good news of a coming cure, believed by you, would make you glad. It would not be the act of believing that you would rejoice in, but the statement believed. You would immediately take the medicine; and when you experienced its healing influence, you would rejoice still more. Your joy in this case would be of two kinds: the first the joy of faith, in the assurance that you would be cured; the second the joy of experience, in finding that you were cured.

Apply this to the case of a sinner who feels his miserable condition under the power and guilt of sin. In his anxiety he tries various methods to obtain relief; he leaves off sin, and tries to be good; but a sense of unpardoned sin still lies upon his heart, and he is far off from settled comfort. In this situation, Christ, the

Physician of souls, comes to him in the message of the gospel, and says, "My blood cleanseth from all sin, and my Spirit can renew and sanctify the hardest and most polluted heart; look to me, and thou shalt be saved." What is the duty of the sinner in this case? Immediately, fully, and at once, to believe, and as the evidence and necessary fruit of his faith, to rejoice. If he really does believe, he will rejoice; and if he do not rejoice, it is because he does not believe. He is not to wait till he is saved, before he takes comfort; but he is to take comfort, in the first place, in believing that there is a Saviour, and that he may be saved. He is not to wait for his comfort till he feels that he is justified, renewed, and sanctified; for how can he come to this state unless he believes? His first comfort must be the joy of faith; and this he must take to himself at once; the joy of experience comes afterward. He must first rejoice in the promise of spiritual healing, and then afterwards he will rejoice in the sense of healing. When the Jews, who were pricked to the heart by Peter's sermon, cried out in agony, "What shall we do?" he replied, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins: then they that gladly received the word were baptized." They gladly received the word, that is, they believed the promise and were made glad. There was immediate faith producing instant joy: they did not wait till they felt they were saved, but rejoiced at once. Now observe another case: Paul, in one of his epistles, says, "Our rejoicing is this, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world." There was the joy of experience. It is the peace of believing, that

the inquirer has to do with; and is it not cause enough of delight that God has loved the world, and you, as a part of the world, so as to give his Son for your salvation; that you are invited; and that Christ is able and willing to save you? But still you cling to the idea, if you could be sure you believed, you would be comforted; if you had evidence of faith, you would take peace. Then it would be those evidences that would comfort you, and not the work of Christ.

It is also of importance that you should clearly understand, that you are never in a state of faith, if you are not brought to some degree of comfort; if you still feel the load of guilt upon your conscience, and all its tormenting fears in your mind; if you are still anxiously asking the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" If you are still afraid of God, if you still are without any hope of forgiveness, you do not believe; for genuine faith, even though it were not full assurance, would in some measure relieve you from this anxiety. It is very common for persons to say they believe, and yet have no comfort; and then they are asking, "Why am I not at peace?" Because you do not really believe in Christ; you are deceiving yourself. It is faith, genuine faith, you want: you have not yet really trusted in Christ; you have not believed the glad tidings of salvation; for can any man believe glad tidings concerning himself, and yet not be made glad by them? Believe then, believe truly, believe now, and enter into peace.

CHAPTER VI.

MISTAKES INTO WHICH INQUIRERS ARE APT TO FALL.

In an affair of such tremendous consequence as the salvation of the soul, it is important that every error of any moment into which inquirers are in danger of falling should be clearly pointed out to them. Satan is called the father of lies, and when his delusive influence is added to the natural deceitfulness of the human heart, the danger of mistake in this matter is great indeed. Our caution against errors should, of course, be in proportion to the importance of the consequences they draw after them. Oh, how awful is the idea of committing a fundamental error in religious matters, and persevering in that error till death! We shall then have eternity to deplore it, but never have a moment to correct it. Oh how dreadful to die, and find ourselves mistaken as to our character and destiny! But even where the error is not of so serious a nature, it may still be the source of much disquietude.

1. The first error which inquirers are in danger of committing, (and it is both a very common and a very dreadful one,) is, to mistake knowledge, impressions, and partial reformation, for genuine conversion. In

this day when evangelical preaching and religious instruction are so abundant, where there is no persecution to try men's sincerity, and even much credit attaching to a profession of religion, there is most imminent danger of self-delusion. The preaching of the present day is of an exciting and impressive character, which, added to the knowledge acquired from a religious education, is very likely to produce a state of feeling that may be mistaken for conversion. Ignorant friends, anxious parents, and even injudicious ministers, who are too eager to swell the number of their communicants, upon perceiving a little impression of mind, and a little alteration of conduct, in young people or in others, may express a favourable opinion of their conversion, flatter them into a belief that they are safe, and engage them too hastily to make a public profession of religion and receive the Lord's supper, while perhaps, the great change has never been wrought in them; and thus their souls are in all probability, sealed up in delusion to eternal perdition. Nothing can now awaken them; for although their impressions die away, and they become almost as careless, as worldly, as sinful as ever; yet they have taken up a profession of religion, have been led to believe they are Christians, and therefore repress every rising fear, and stifle every incipient alarm. Fatal case! and it is the case of multitudes.

It may be worth while to set before you how far persons may go, and not be really converted. They may have many and deep impressions, many and strong convictions; they may have much knowledge of their sinful state, and a heavy and burdensome sense of their guilt; they may look back upon their past lives and conduct with much remorse; they may be sorry for

their sins; and may desire to be saved from the consequences of them, being much alarmed at the prospect of the torments of hell. Was not Judas convinced of sin, and did not he weep bitterly and confess his sin, and was not he filled with remorse? Was not Cain convinced of sin? I have known many persons, who at one time appeared to be more deeply impressed with a sense of sin, and to have stronger convictions and remorse, than many who were truly converted, and yet they went back again to the world and sin. Nor is a detestation of sin always a true sign of conversion. Hazael, before he was king of Syria, detested the crimes which he afterwards perpetrated in the fulness of his pride and power. Unconverted persons may even wish to be delivered from the fetters of those corrupt lusts, which have long held them fast; for there are few notorious sinners, who do not frequently hate their sins, and wish and purpose to reform. Yea, persons may sometimes desire to be delivered from all sin; at least they may desire it in a certain way, because they think that it is necessary in order to be saved from hell. And as conviction of sin may exist without conversion, so may religious joy. The stony ground hearers "heard the word, and with joy received it," and yet they had "no root in themselves, and endured only for a while." The Galatians had great blessedness at one time, which the apostle was afraid had come to nothing. Multitudes rejoiced in Christ when he made his entrance into Jerusalem, who afterwards became his enemies. A person may admire the people of God, and covet to be of their number, as Balaam did, and yet not really belong to them. Many take great pleasure in hearing sermons, and going to prayer-meetings, and singing

hymns, and frequenting missionary and other public meetings, who are not truly born of the Spirit. So also do many persons leave off sinful actions, and give up many wicked practices, and seem to be quite altered for a time, and yet, by their subsequent history, show that they are not converted. There may be considerable zeal for the outward concerns of religion, as we see in Jehu, without any right state of mind towards God. Many have had great confidence of the reality of their conversion; they have had dreams, impressions, and an inward witness, as they suppose, and yet too plainly proved, by their after-conduct, that they were under an awful delusion. But it would be almost endless to point out the various ways in which men deceive themselves, as to their state. Millions who have been somewhat, yea, much concerned about religion, have never been born again of the Spirit. Perhaps as many are lost by self-deception, as by any other means. Hell resounds with the groans and lamentations of souls that perished through the power of deceived hearts.

Do, do examine yourselves. Exercise godly jealousy over your own state. Never forget that nothing short of the new birth will save you. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Our very nature must be changed, entirely changed. We must be renewed in the spirit of our mind. There must be a superhuman, a Divine, a total alteration of disposition. Our views and tastes, pains and pleasures, hopes and fears, desires and pursuits, must be changed. We must be brought to love God supremely, for his holiness and justice, as

well as for his mercy and love in Christ; to delight in him for his transcendant glory, as well as for his rich grace; we must have a perception of the beauties of holiness, and love Divine things for their own excellence; we must mourn for sin, and hate it for its own evil nature, as well as its dreadful punishment; we must feel delight in the salvation of Christ, not only because it delivers us from hell, but makes us like God, and all this in a way that honours and glorifies Jehovah; we must be made partakers of true humility and universal love, and feel ourselves brought to be of one mind with God, in willing and delighting in the happiness of others; we must be brought to feel an identity of heart with God's cause, and to regard it as our honour and happiness to do anything to promote the glory of Christ in the salvation of sinners; we must feel a longing desire, a hungering and thirsting after holiness, as well as come to a determination to put away all sins, however gainful or pleasant; we must have a tender conscience, that shrinks from and watches against little sins, secret faults, and sins of neglect and omission, as well as great and scandalous offences; we must love the people of God, for God's sake, because they belong to him and are like him; we must practise the self-denying duty of mortification of sin, as well as engage in the pleasing exercises of religion. This is to be born again: and it is no mere transient impression upon the imagination, but it is a permanent renewal of the disposition; it is not an occasional impulse, but an abiding character. The subject of it may not be violently agitated, but he is lastingly altered; his passions may not be powerfully moved, but his principles, tastes, and pursuits are engaged on the side of true holiness. He

is now a spiritual man, whereas he was a carnal one, and all things are spiritually discerned by him. Nothing short of this entire change of heart, this complete renovation of the nature, must satisfy you; for nothing less than such a view of Christ in his glorious mediatorial character, and such a dependence by faith upon his blood and righteousness for salvation, as changes the whole heart, and temper, and conduct, throws the world as it were into the back ground, and makes glory hereafter, and holiness now, the supreme concern, is religion.

2. Inquirers are often in error on the subject of their immediate obligation to believe, and go to Christ; and are waiting, as they say, for a day of power at the pool of ordinances.* They are seeking and praying, but they have no idea that it is their present duty, without waiting another hour, to give themselves to Christ. They are expecting some sensible impression or impulse upon their mind, to make known to them when it is their duty to believe, and also enable them to believe. They suppose it will at some time be made clear to them, as it was to the cripples by the troubling of the waters, that they are no longer to wait, but immediately to descend into the pool of salvation.

Now this is a most grievous and injurious error, and keeps many minds for a long period in great distress, and actually prevents some from coming to Christ at all. I must first tell you, that it is an utter perversion of Scripture, to consider the pool of Bethesda as an emblem of the healing of sinners by the work of Christ;

* There is in this chapter a repetition of some of the ideas, and even the expressions, contained in a former section, but it is on a subject of so much importance, that I do not choose to suppress them.

and the situation of the diseased persons waiting for the healing visit of the angel, as descriptive of the duty of sinners to wait for some impulse or power from above, before they believe. The fact was related merely to show the power and glory of Christ in working a miraculous cure. Where in all the New Testament are sinners told to wait till some future time before they believe? Where is it said, "Believe, but not now; hope, but not now; wait for some power or impulse to enable you to believe?" On the contrary, is it not said, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts; now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation?" Is not God willing to pardon you this moment; Christ willing to save you this moment; the Spirit waiting to renew and sanctify you this moment? Are not all the promises true now, all the blessings of salvation ready and waiting for your acceptance now? What then are you waiting for, or why should you wait at all? Could a voice from heaven, or any impulse in your hearts, make it more certain than the word of God makes it, that Christ is willing to save you? Look steadily at this promise, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Is that the language of Christ? Yes. Is it true? Yes. Does it say anything about waiting for an impulse? No. What then are you hesitating about? It is as true this moment as it ever will or can be; and if you wait for anything else but the word of Christ, you will spend all your time in waiting, and die deceived at last. True, you need the influence of the Spirit, to assist you to believe, but that influence is always as ready as the benefit of the work of Christ.

But, say others, "We are waiting to be more deeply

convinced of sin." Are you convinced that you are under the condemnation of the law; such a sinner as to be totally depraved in your nature, as well as guilty of innumerable actual sins, and deserving of hell? Is this clear to your judgment, and really felt by your conscience; then what are you waiting for? If you say, for more sorrow of heart, more pungent convictions, I would ask again, how deep do you suppose your convictions must be, before you believe in Christ, and hope for mercy? Can you fix on any standard on this subject? Besides, do you suppose that if your convictions were ten times as deep as they now are, these feelings of yours would be your warrant to go to Christ, or render you more welcome to him, or be in any measure your ground of hope? Are you not wishing for deep convictions, to take comfort in them, instead of Christ? Has Christ anywhere said, he will not receive you till your convictions have attained a certain depth? The question is, Are you really convinced? not, How deeply are you convinced? And then, as to godly sorrow, this will be promoted by faith. "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and mourn," says the Lord Jesus, concerning the Jews. The belief of God's love to us in Christ, and the sweet hope of his mercy, will melt the heart to tenderness. I wish you to dwell upon this. It is the hope, the sense of God's love, that warms and thaws the cold and frozen heart of man. As you gaze upon a crucified Redeemer by faith; as you hear God say, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy sins by the blood of my Son; I will forgive thee all, notwithstanding thy rebellion, and thy too great lukewarmness;" your soul will dissolve in ingenuous grief and love. In keeping back from Christ, in waiting for deeper

emotions before you come to him, you are defeating your own purpose. The more and sooner you hope in Christ, the more and sooner will you mourn for sin. Every fresh view you take of his cross, when you are indulging an expectation of mercy, will deepen your emotions of sorrow, and your convictions of the evil of sin. All the sensibilities of your heart will be moved by the amazing spectacle; and that very scene which conveys to your soul the sense of pardon, will convey also a sense of the bitterness of your transgression. Wait no longer then; believe, believe now; commit your soul at once to the Saviour, and rejoice in hope of salvation.

Others are waiting for more holiness, for some preparatory process, before they rest upon Christ for eternal life. A preparatory process indeed there is, and must be, carried on in the heart before the sinner will go to Christ. But what is that process? Nothing which is to prevent his soul, for a moment, when he is anxious about salvation, from depending upon Christ. It is the work of the Holy Spirit giving him a sense of his sin, and a desire to flee from the wrath to come. But in the case of those whom I am addressing, I mean those who are anxious about salvation, this is already done; they are convinced of sin, and desirous to flee from impending judgment. What more is necessary to prepare them to believe in Christ? But what is meant by those who talk thus, is, that there must be a long course of conviction; a production and growth of early affections; a series of holy actions; an expansion of religious knowledge; and that then, and not till then, sinners are encouraged to trust in Christ, and hope for salvation. Now, it is very true, that every sinner, in

coming to Christ by faith, must be prepared and ready to give up every sin; he must be willing to sacrifice sins that may be as pleasant as a right eye, and as useful as a right hand; he must be willing to take up his cross, and follow Christ to bonds, imprisonment, and death; he must consider himself as "called unto holiness," and this is his state of mind, as soon as he is really convinced of sin; what more in the way of preparation for pardon does he need? Is not a man prepared for forgiveness, as soon as he is convinced of his transgression? If a father promise pardon to an offending child as soon as he shall confess his fault, has that child any need to say, "I will prepare myself for pardon by a long course of future good conduct?" His father is ready to forgive him, and he of course is ready to be forgiven, upon the very first moment of true penitence. If God had said he would not pardon us, till months or years of good conduct had taken place, he would have been only mocking us; for what good conduct can we perform till he has received us into his favour, and bestowed upon us his Spirit? The first concern of a sinner is, or should be, to be pardoned; the second, to be holy; and he should desire the first, in order to the second. It is a radical error to suppose that sanctification goes before justification. We must first be justified, before we can be sanctified. Mark this well. I repeat it, that you may notice and weigh it well, we must be justified before we can be sanctified. We are justified by faith; and without faith we cannot please God; consequently, till we believe, we can perform no good works; and when we believe, we are accepted of God. Faith, then, is immediately our duty, without waiting for any preparatory process. But, perhaps, this

will be made still more plain by a reference to examples. Take then the conversions, or at least some of them, recorded in Scripture.

Take the case of the penitent thief. What preparatory process went on in this man's mind heart and conduct, beyond the work of the Spirit, in convincing him of sin? He appears to have thought of his sin, and repented for the first time, when he was crucified; and at almost the same moment believed in Christ, and entertained a hope of mercy.

Read the account of the three thousand converted on the day of Pentecost. Up to the time when they heard Peter's sermon, they were the murderers of Christ; by that sermon they were convinced of sin, and that same day they were rejoicing in the assurance of pardon. Now what preparatory process was carried on in their hearts, beyond the work of the Spirit in convincing them of sin?

Consider the conversion of the apostle Paul, who was a bloody persecutor; and a day or two after, not only a pardoned sinner, a baptized believer, a rejoicing Christian, but a consecrated apostle. What preparatory process in the way of long-cherished convictions, or holy actions, was there in him?

Consult the narrative of the Philippian jailor. In the same night he was convinced of sin, he believed in Christ, he was filled with peace, and was baptized. When, in agony of soul, he cried out, "What must I do to be saved?" his heaven-inspired teacher replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved?" The apostle did not speak to him of any preparatory process, any long course of prescribed duties, any training for his reception by Christ, but

simply said, "Believe;" and he meant, of course, believe now; and so the trembling penitent understood him, for he believed at once, and entered into peace.

I bring forward these instances, (and almost all the other cases of conversion spoken of in the New Testament are of a similar nature,) to prove, not that all conversions are equally sudden and remarkable, but only this one point, That no other preparation in the sinner's mind is necessary, in order to his believing and being justified, but a real conviction of sin. As soon as a man knows he is a lost sinner, that is, is truly convinced of his state of condemnation, he is required to believe in Christ, and to hope for pardon: then he is in a state, a fit state, to receive it; and moreover, he would not be, and could not be, more fit by waiting ten years in the most agonizing convictions, or the most holy performance of duty. The sinner is condemned, and is any moment after conviction in a state to be reprieved; and he can never begin to perform the acts of a good citizen till he is justified. Faith is the very first act of evangelical obedience which any one can render to God, and it is the spring of all others. We never can be holy till we believe in Christ; and, therefore, all ideas of preparation for coming to Christ are erroneous, arise from mistaken views of the way of a sinner's acceptance with God, and are generally to be traced to a principle of self-righteousness. This, perhaps, will be the case with many who will read these pages; they will want to be more prepared, either by convictions or by holiness, for coming to Christ; that is, they will want something of their own in which to glory; something to give them courage and confidence in approaching the Saviour; something to render them

less dependent on free, sovereign grace; something to entitle them, if not to salvation, at least to the righteousness of Christ as the meritorious cause of it. Anxious inquirer! you know not the secret workings of pride and self-righteousness in your soul; you are not yet acquainted with the deceitfulness of the human heart; you are ignorant of the artifices of Satan, or you would detect in those longings after some preparatory process a scheme of the enemy of souls to keep you from Christ; yes, it is a veil to hide from your view the glory of his cross, and a stumbling-block to hinder you from approaching the fountain of life. Wait no longer: "If you tarry till you're better, you will never come at all." It is of infinite consequence for you to remember, that you are received, not as worthy, but as unworthy; not as favourites, but as those who have been enemies; not as deserving life by your convictions, but as sentenced to death for your transgressions. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Mark that expression; there is a vast comprehension of subject in it; it is the key to a correct knowledge of justification; "believeth in him that justifieth the ungodly." We are justified, so far as we are concerned, under the character of "ungodly." If, then, we seek to make ourselves godly before we come to Christ, and wish to come under that character, we are shutting ourselves out from the blessing of justification; for this is granted only to them who consider themselves ungodly.

3. Another mistake into which inquirers fall in the commencement of a religious course is, to indulge a misplaced solicitude about the evidences of personal religion. I know that the sacred writers speak much

and often on the subject of evidences of personal religion. But a person must have religion before he can possess the evidence of it; and at present your solicitude should be rather to be Christians than to know you are such. It is, however, a very common case for persons, as soon as they begin to be anxious about religion, to begin also to be anxious to find out the marks of salvation in themselves. Hence they are ever microscopically analyzing all their feelings, watching their motives, reviewing their conduct; sometimes hoping, when they see, or think they see, a good mark; but more generally desponding, as the result of seeing so much that is positively wrong, or really defective in the state of their hearts. I wish you to attend to this remark; That inquirers after salvation should be much more occupied in looking to Christ, than in looking into their own hearts: and that when they do look into themselves, it should be for conviction, and not for consolation.

Consider the case of the Israelites, when bitten by the fiery serpents in the wilderness. Moses, you know, was ordered to make a brazen serpent, and elevate it upon a pole, and whosoever looked upon the brazen figure lived. "Look and live," was the mandate and promise. Now cannot you fancy you see the poor poisoned creatures, straining their very eyes in gazing upon the object appointed for their healing? Do you think they spent all their time, or much of their time, or any of it, in examining the wounds, to see if they were healing? Were they so foolish as to look off from the means of cure, to ascertain their progress in recovery? No, they would not have taken their eye from the brazen serpent to look at a second sun, if it

had been at that time kindled in the firmament. Their eye was fixed; and as they looked, they felt their pain assuaged; their fever cooled; their health returning: if they looked off, they felt in danger of relapse; and in this way they recovered.

Thus should it be with the sinner; he should look to Jesus: healing is there; and is obtained, not by looking to see if it is come, or is coming. The more the mind is fixed on Christ, the more clear its views are of his mediatorial work, the more steady and fixed the eye of faith is on the cross of him who was lifted up, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life," the firmer will be the consciousness of the soul that it does believe, and the more abundant will be all the fruits and evidences of faith. The Israelite had no doubt of his healing as long as he looked to the brazen serpent, for he felt it going on; nor will the soul doubt of its acceptance with God, so long as it looks to Christ. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself," not only of the truth of Christianity, but of his own personal religion. The way to have our evidences increased, is to have our faith increased; and the way to have our faith increased, is not by looking into ourselves, who are the subjects of faith, but out of ourselves to Christ, who is the object of faith.

Faith is the mainspring and regulator of all the graces; our joy, our love, our hope, will all be in proportion to our faith; and our faith can never be strengthened by an anxious and constant poring over the feelings of our hearts. Nor can our faith be strengthened merely by determining to be strong in faith; but by an intelligent and increasingly clear view of the person and

work of Christ. "How long," said David, "shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?" He tells us almost immediately after how he got rid of his grief, even by looking away from himself, to God: "I have trusted in thy mercy, my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation." The first evidence of faith is the peace of mind that it brings to the soul, or the relief which it affords from the burden of sin; the next is holiness; but there can be neither peace nor holiness till there is faith. Many people, I apprehend, are greatly deceived in their supposed object in seeking for marks of conversion; it is not evidence of faith they are seeking after, but matter of faith; not evidence that they have received the righteousness of Christ, but evidence out of which they may make a righteousness of their own. They want comfort, and instead of looking for it in Christ they are looking for it in themselves. Hence, when they have found, or think they have found, a good mark in themselves, they rejoice in it, as those that have found great spoil.

Doubting, dejected, and anxious sinner, thou hast been reading, thinking, hearing, praying, striving, examining, consulting books upon evidences, and lists of marks of salvation, inquiring of others how they feel, and what they conclude to be evidence of a work of grace, and yet thou art as far from any satisfactory conclusion, as to thy state, as ever; like the beast in the mire, all thy striving seems but to sink thee deeper and deeper. Now then take another plan, since thine own has failed, and instead of troubling thyself about evidences, look to Christ; keep thine eye fixed on him; meditate upon the Divinity of his person; the sufficiency

of his atonement; the perfection of his righteousness; the riches of his grace; the universality of his invitations. Look at the object of faith, the grounds of faith, the warrant of faith; the more thou dost this, the stronger thy faith will become; and the stronger thy faith is, the greater thy peace will be. Instead of labouring to love Christ, and becoming dejected that thou dost not love him more, take another course, and dwell upon the love of Christ to thee. Meditate on his amazing grace, his most wonderful compassion, not only to the world in general, but to thee, as part of the world; labour and pray to be "able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." This, this is the way to grow in love to him; for if we love him, it is because he first loved us. It is a great principle which I am anxious to impress upon you, that subjective religion, or, in other words, religion in us, is produced and sustained by fixing the mind on objective religion, or the facts and doctrines of the word of God. Neither evidences nor comfort should be sought directly, or on their own account, or as separate things, but as the result of faith. Take this as an important sentiment, that the subject of evidences belongs more to the believer than to the inquirer; to the Christian, who professes to be already in the way, and not to the anxious seeker after the way.

4. But there is another mistake which inquirers are apt to make, which, though nearly allied to what I have already stated, is sufficiently distinct to justify a separate consideration of it, and that is, confounding faith and assurance. Faith is such a cordial belief that Christ

died for sinners, as leads me to a dependence upon him for my salvation; assurance, as the word is usually understood in religious discourse, means a persuasion that I do so believe, and am in a state of salvation: faith means a belief that Christ is willing to receive me; assurance means conviction that he has received me; that, in short, I am a Christian. Now it is manifest that these two are different from each other; one of them, that is, faith, signifying the performance of an action, or coming into a certain state; and the other, the consciousness that I have come into that state. It is also equally evident that faith must precede assurance. We must first believe that Christ died for sinners, before we can know that we have believed. The first simple act of faith is a belief that Christ died for all sinners, for the whole world; the next, as arising out of it, if it be not indeed included in it, is that he died for us as part of the world. "I believe," says the sinner, who is coming with confidence to Christ, "'that God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life:' then, as I am a part of the world, I believe he loved me, and is willing to save me:" this is faith. The soul then feels joy and peace in believing, love to God, gratitude to Christ, hatred of sin, subjugation of the world, fellowship with the righteous. "Now," says the man, "I know I believe, I am conscious both of the act of believing, and also of its gracious effects:" this is assurance.

I may illustrate the subject by referring again to the rebellious subjects and their gracious sovereign. The ringleader of a revolt can scarcely persuade himself

that he can be included in the act of amnesty; he reads the proclamation again, which runs thus: The king, pitying his deluded subjects, and filled with clemency, will grant a gracious pardon to whomsoever will lay down their arms by such a day. Having examined the proofs of the authenticity of the act, and being satisfied on that point, he says, "It is really true, and I believe that the king is willing to pardon all that submit; and as he has made no exception against any, but says, Whosoever will lay down his arms shall be forgiven, I believe that there is mercy for me." Thus far faith goes; and even before he reaches the scene of pardon, or takes a step towards it, his mind is at rest; the proclamation itself, as soon as it is understood and believed, gives him comfort; he has no doubt of his being accepted. He goes and lays down his arms, and now he is assured he is safe; he is conscious he has done what the monarch required, and he feels he has what the monarch promised. In his case, however, you perceive that there would not be much solicitude about assurance. Faith, and compliance with the monarch's demand, would be all that he would concern himself about. Assurance would follow upon faith and action. So should it be with anxious inquirers after salvation: their business is to believe, what? that they are Christians? no; for a belief that I am a Christian is not faith, but assurance; but to believe the Gospel, which is God's proclamation of mercy and pardon to his rebel subjects: they are to feel persuaded that God has loved them in common with other sinners, invited them, and promised to receive them, and take the comfort of this revelation of mercy; and then, from the pacifying effect

of this upon their conscience, and the purifying effect of it upon their hearts, to be assured they have believed, and have passed from death unto life. Faith then is not assurance, but the cause of it.

Now, inquirer, are you not aware that you have confounded these two; and have been consequently walking in great perplexity? You are dejected, and cannot be comforted. Why? "Oh," you say, "my faith is so weak; indeed, I am afraid I have no faith." Now, what do you mean by having no faith? "I am afraid I am not a Christian. I fear I do not believe. I am full of unbelief." But let me tell you, that you never can be delivered from distress in this way; for you are wanting to know you are a Christian before you are one; you are striving to know you are a believer before you believe; you wish to be assured you are accepted of Christ, in order that you may go to him for acceptance. Faith is not believing that you are a Christian, but believing that Christ died for sinners; and unbelief is not doubting that you are a Christian, but doubting Christ's willingness to save you. My advice to you then is, to leave assurance, as a first matter, out of consideration; to talk nothing, and think nothing, about it. Your business, at present, is with faith: you are to believe; you are to trust your soul upon the atonement of Christ; you are to be persuaded that he died for sinners, died for you, and is willing to save you. This is the assurance you are to seek; and this is what the apostle means by the full assurance of faith; an unhesitating confidence that the Lord Jesus is able and willing to save to the uttermost; and, therefore, able and willing to save you. Get your mind full of conviction of the

truth of this; let your soul be thrown, as it were, wide open, to admit this delightful persuasion, that Christ is mighty to save; delighted to save; waiting to save all, you among the rest; you as willingly as any of the rest; and then this truth will give you such peace, and exert such a power over your heart, as to prove to you the existence and reality of your faith. The assurance which the Scriptures speak of is the assurance of God's love to you in Christ; and this, I again say, is the only assurance which you have to do with at present.

CHAPTER VII.

PERPLEXITIES OFTEN FELT BY INQUIRERS.

1. Many are exceedingly perplexed and distressed on the subject of their personal election to eternal life.

I have nothing to do now with those careless or profane persons, who make this awful doctrine, or rather profess to make it, an excuse, for the entire neglect of religion; and who, with wicked indifference, exclaim, "If I am elected to be saved, I shall be saved, without any concern of mine; but if I am not elected, no effort of mine will or can save me." The fact is, that such persons do not believe in the doctrine of election at all; nor, indeed, care anything about salvation, but are utterly ignorant and careless, and refer to this solemn truth, either to quiet their own conscience, or to silence and turn away the voice of faithful admonition. But there are others who do feel, especially in the early stages of religious inquiry, no small degree of perplexity on this subject. Now, here let me at once inform you, that you, who are inquiring after salvation, have nothing to do with the doctrine of election; nor, indeed, has any one aught to do with the secret purposes of God, as a rule of conduct. The sublime truth of God's sovereignty in the salvation of his people is introduced in Scripture, not to discourage

the approach of the sinner to Christ for salvation, but to remind those who have come to him, that their salvation is all of grace; to take away from them all ground of boasting; to confirm their faith in the accomplishment of the Divine promises; to promote their comfort; to inculcate the necessity of personal holiness; and to encourage Christians amidst the afflictions of life, Rom. viii, 9; Ephes. i, 4, 5, 9, 11; 1 Peter i, 2. But it was never designed to be a source of discouragement to penitents. The rule of your conduct is the invitation and promise of Christ, not the secret purposes of God: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." The mercy of God is infinite; the merit of Christ's atonement is infinite; the power of the Spirit is infinite; and the invitations of the Gospel are universal. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." And thus saith the Lord, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." "The Lord is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Now, these are the words of Scripture, and must, therefore, be true; and here is the rule of your conduct. You can understand this, but you know nothing about the secret purposes of God. Besides, if you knew you were elected, you would not be received and saved because of this knowledge, but because you believed in Christ, who invites men, not as elected to life, but as lost sinners condemned to death. If you had been permitted to read the decrees of heaven, and had seen your name

in the Lamb's book of life, you would not be one whit more welcome to Christ than you are now that you know nothing about the matter. You are invited; and if you neglect the invitation which you do know, because of a decree which you do not know, the blame of perishing will lie at your own door; and you will find at last that you are lost, not in consequence of any purpose of God determining you to be lost, but in consequence of your own unbelief.

Why should the purpose of God, in reference to salvation, be that only view of the Divine decree that perplexes you? Do you not believe there is also a purpose which refers to the events of your natural life and death? But do you, on this account, hesitate in sickness to take the medicine prescribed for you by a skilful physician, lest you should not be ordained to life? No. You say, and with reason, "I know nothing about the Divine purpose; my business is with plain rules of duty, and with instituted means; for if I am to live, I can expect recovery only by these means." Act thus in reference to your souls; leave God's decrees out of consideration, for you know nothing about them, and have nothing to do with them. You are invited to use the means of life; if you are decreed to be saved, you must be saved by them; and if you use them aright, you certainly will be saved. If any use at all is to be made, by an inquirer, of the doctrine of election, it is a use in his own favour. You know not that you are not elected, and the very solicitude of your mind about salvation is a presumption that you are, since that solicitude is the way in which God carries his decree into execution. Besides, if you get away from the invitation, and instead of making that the rule of

your conduct, trouble your head with other views and subjects, you will find as much perplexity in God's foreknowledge as you do in his decrees. Even those who deny the purposes of God have just as much reason to perplex themselves with Divine prescience, and say, "Whatsoever God foresees, and nothing but what he foresees, will take place; now he foresees either that I shall be saved or lost; and as I do not know that he foresees that I shall be saved, I am greatly discouraged." Abandon at once, therefore, all solicitude, and indeed all thoughts about the decree, and fix you attention on the invitation. Christ bids you come to him for salvation; and every bar and obstacle which lies in the way of your coming is placed there by you, and not by him. He does not say, Come when you have ascertained your election; but, Come and ascertain it. He does not say, You are welcome if you have read the decree; but, You are welcome if you believe the promise. He does not say, Come under the presumption that you are predestinated; but, Come with the assurance that you are bidden. Your business is to make your calling sure, and then you will no longer doubt of your election.

2. Another source of perplexity with some is, a fear that they have committed the unpardonable blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

This is by no means an uncommon ground of painful solicitude; and even when it does not amount to a deep and terrifying conviction, yet the subject haunts the imagination with many distressing fears, keeps the mind unsettled, and prevents that calm and tranquillizing reliance to which the penitent is invited. Now, I wish you to know that in whatever awful and terrific obscurity this subject is enveloped, no one that

is really anxious about his salvation need to be under the least fear that he has passed the line of hope, and entered the region where mercy never dispenses pardon; the very fear of having committed this sin, when such fear is connected with concern about religion, is a proof that it has not been committed. It may be taken for granted, that in every case where this mysterious crime has been committed, the transgressor is given up either to a deadly stupor or a raging frenzy of the conscience. But, perhaps, the best way of removing the apprehension is to explain the subject which occasions it. What is the nature of this sin? Read the account of it: "Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." The occasion of these awful words was the conduct of the Pharisees, in ascribing the miracles of Christ, the reality of which they could not deny or doubt, to the power of the devil. Still, though this was the occasion of the words, it was not a description of the sin; for this was speaking against the Son of man, and not against the Holy Ghost, which was not yet poured out.* The day of Pentecost, properly speaking, commenced the dispensation of the Spirit;

* It is proper to remark here, that very many wise and good men are of opinion, that this awful crime referred as truly to the miracles wrought by Christ during his personal ministry, as to those which were wrought by the Holy Ghost, through the instrumentality of the apostles, on and after the day of Pentecost.

when his Divine gifts, conferred upon the apostles, completed the evidence of the Christian economy; and the language of Christ, therefore, seemed to direct the Pharisees forward, in the way of impressive warning, to that event; and to remind them, though they understood him not, that the malicious contempt cast upon his miracles, if repeated after the Holy Ghost was poured out, would fill the measure of their iniquities, seal them up in unbelief, and place them beyond the reach of mercy. There would remain no further evidence of the Divine mission of Christ; the last and the fullest attestation to his Messiahship would be rejected and reviled with malice of heart. If, in addition to this, you will just recollect the meaning of the term blasphemy, which signifies to speak reproachfully, opprobriously, or impiously, you will then have the nature of this crime before you. It is knowledge in the mind that miracles were wrought; malice in the heart against Christ, in attestation of whom they were given; contempt of the Holy Ghost, their author; and the language of spite upon the tongue, reviling the miracles themselves, by ascribing them to the agency of devils. It is not simple unbelief under the dispensation of the Spirit, persevered in till death; it is not mere infidelity, even under very aggravated circumstances; but it is the union of conviction, malice, and impiety. It is therefore evident, that if this sin is now ever committed, no inquirer after salvation needs for a moment entertain any apprehension that it has been committed by him. He has not passed the boundary of mercy; nor is there any sin he has ever been guilty of, however enormous in magnitude, or however painful

in remembrance, but the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse it away.

But this leads me to another perplexity, which is felt by others; who, though they do not fear that they have been guilty of this unpardonable crime, are distressed by the apprehension that their sins are too great, too numerous, or too peculiar to be forgiven. Sometimes convinced sinners are enabled by Divine grace to indulge the hope of pardon, almost as soon as they receive the conviction of sin. Yea, some are led to see the evil of sin at first, more by the mercy of the gospel, than the stern justice which appears in the law; but others are long and sorely harassed by fears of rejection, before they are brought to a comfortable expectation of forgiveness. This is more commonly the case with those who have gone to great lengths in sin, and have resisted the clearest and loudest warnings of conscience; it is not unusual for such persons, when truly awakened to a sense of their sin and danger, to plunge into the very depths of despondency, and to remain for a long time without hope or peace.

In some cases, I think it possible that this desponding frame of mind is really cherished, as if it were an evidence of sincere and deep repentance: there are those who look upon doubts and fears as the marks of a work of grace, and proofs of genuine piety. This, however, is a great delusion, since true godly sorrow is both accompanied and promoted by faith and hope. Despair tends to harden the heart, and to freeze up the feelings of penitence. God cannot be glorified, nor Christ honoured, by doubting of his ability or willingness to save. I am persuaded that many persons say more about their sins being too great to be pardoned, than

they either believe or feel, from a supposition that it is a token of humility to talk thus. Watch against this, for it is an act of guilty insincerity: it is trifling with sacred things, and should be avoided.

But there are many who are really distressed with the most painful solicitude, and the most gloomy apprehensions, about the pardon of their sins. Now here let me put a plain question to you: Is your concern merely to be pardoned, or to be sanctified as well as pardoned? Are you afraid only of being left under the punishment of sin, or do you also fear being left under its power? If you are so selfish as to be anxious for nothing but your own safety, without caring for holiness, no wonder you are left by God to such dark despondency. You do not yet understand the design of Christ's work, which is not merely to deliver from hell, but also from sin. Change, then, or rather enlarge the object of your hope, so as to include sanctification as well as justification, and in all probability your unbelief and distress will soon give way; for it will be found easier, perhaps, to some to believe that God is willing to make them holy, than to forgive them. Desponding sinner, think of this; the salvation of Christ is designed to make you a new creature, and to restore the image of God to your soul; and do you not believe that God must be infinitely willing to do this?

After all, however, there are some, who, even with this view of the design of Christ's death, cannot be induced to hope that their sins can be forgiven: none have sinned, they think, like them; there are aggravations in their sins, not to be found in the conduct of any other. Now I refer such burdened and desponding minds, to the promises of God's word. Read attentively

such declarations as are found in the following passages: Isaiah xliv, 22; Isaiah lv, 6, 7; Micah vii, 18, 19; Matthew xii, 31, 32. Dwell, especially, upon this last passage, because it most explicitly declares that the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is the only sin excepted from forgiveness. If, then, you are led to see that you have not committed the only sin for which there is no forgiveness, it must, I think, appear plain to you, that your transgressions are not unpardonable.

Dwell much upon the perfection of Christ's work in making atonement for sin. The apostle declares that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. It would seem as if this declaration were written on purpose to meet such cases as yours. This Scripture says positively, the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. "No," you say, in flat and perverse contradiction, "it cannot cleanse from mine." Did Christ die to save sinners, and yet are there some sinners to be found, according to your view, whom he cannot save? Then his work of salvation is unfinished, and his character as a Saviour is incomplete. Has he not already saved millions by the merit of his death? Well, suppose all the sins of those millions had been in you alone, could he not as easily have saved you, in that case, as he has saved them? Certainly he could. Can you really make up your mind to go and say to Christ, "Lord, thou canst not, wilt not, save me; there is neither love enough in thy heart, nor power enough in thy Spirit, nor merit enough in thy great sacrifice, to save me. Look upon me, and behold a sinner whom even thou canst not save: behold in me a sinner whom thy utmost ability cannot reach." No, you cannot say this; and yet you might say it, and innocently say it, if what

you affirm were true, that your sins are too great to be forgiven. Let it be admitted, for the sake of argument, that you are the chief of sinners, still Christ can save you; so at least the apostle thought, when he said, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." And now read what follows: "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first [or, as it signifies, in me the chief sinner] Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." Think what Saul of Tarsus was; a bloody persecutor, and even murderer of the disciples of Christ; yet Christ not only pardoned him, but raised him to the dignity of the chief of the apostles. For what purpose? To be a pattern of God's mercy to the end of time. Yes, there he stands, upon the pedestal of his own immortal writings, a monument of the riches, power, and sovereignty of Divine grace, bearing this inscription: "I, who was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious, obtained mercy. Let no man ever despair; for if there arise a greater sinner than I was, let him look on me, and hope for pardon through the blood of Christ. I was forgiven, to encourage the wickedest of men to repent, to believe in Jesus, and expect salvation."

Consider well the other instances recorded in the word of God, of pardon granted to some of the greatest sinners. There is scarcely one class of sinners, or one kind of crime, which is not specifically mentioned in Scripture as having been pardoned. Think of Manasseh, an apostate, an idolater, a wholesale murderer, a man whose example and authority as a king were employed to fill his nation with iniquity: of David, who was guilty

of the united crimes of adultery and murder: of the dying malefactor, who was saved upon his cross: of the Jews who were converted on the day of Pentecost, and who, though they had been the murderers of Christ, were forgiven: of the once polluted members of the Corinthian church, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 11. What proofs are these that no sins will keep a man from salvation, that do not keep him from Christ. The fact is, that our sins being great or little, few or many, has nothing to do with this matter, in the way of making it more difficult or more easy to obtain mercy. No man is pardoned because his sins are fewer; and none is rejected because his sins are more. Great sinners are as welcome as little ones; for as the skill of the physician is the more displayed in dangerous and difficult cases, than in slight ones, so is the grace of Christ the more illustriously manifested in the pardon and sanctification of notorious sinners, than in the salvation of those who have not gone so far astray. If God's mercy be infinite, it must be as easy to him to pardon a million of sins as one. Desponding sinner, dry up your tears, and doubt no longer. The greatest sin you can commit is to disbelieve God's promise to forgive your other sins. Unbelief is the most heinous of all sins. "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar." Yes, you are giving God the lie to his face, as often as you say your sins are too great to be forgiven. Do you not tremble at this? Is there not abominable pride in unbelief? Who and what are you, that you should suppose God has any object or interest in deceiving you by a false promise? Are you so considerable a person, that he should think it worth his while to falsify his word, in order to draw you into false confidence? Believe, then, from this hour, that

God is more willing to forgive you the greatest of your sins, than you imagine he is to blot out the least of them.

4. Some are perplexed with the notion, that as "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to God," and as none of the works of unregenerate persons are acceptable to God, it is not right for them to pray, since they are not yet believers in Christ. With regard to the expression above alluded to, which speaks of the sacrifice of the wicked, it means the hypocritical religious services of men who are still living in the commission of known sin, and impiously designing to make some atonement for their iniquities by their sacrifices. This is evident from the passage itself, where it is also said, "The way of the wicked is abomination," that is, his conduct; and because his conduct is abominable, therefore his prayer is also abominable. This passage is best expounded by a reference to Isaiah i. 10, 18. It applies to a totally different case from yours. I acknowledge that your prayers do not merit the Divine blessing which you are anxious to obtain, however frequently or fervently they may be presented. You ought not to pray with the idea that there is any worth in your prayers to make any atonement for your sins; nor ought you to look for peace and comfort from your prayers. I go a step further, and remind you that, unless you pray in faith, your prayers are not such as God has engaged to answer. You should believe that God is willing and waiting to bestow all spiritual blessing, for he has promised to do so. To doubt at the time you pray whether God will grant what he has promised, is sin; but to doubt whether it is your duty to pray, because you do not yet

know that you are accepted of God, is unquestionably wrong. You may as well question whether it is your duty to read the Bible, or to go to public worship. Did not Peter tell Simon Magus to pray? "Repent, therefore," said he, "of this thy wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee; for I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." And we read of many instances in the Old Testament of persons praying, and being heard and answered, who were not at the time truly converted to God; as, for example, Ahab, 1 Kings xxi. 29; Jehoahaz, 2 Kings xiii. 4, 5. So also the Ninevites prayed, and obtained favour of God, Jonah iii. 5, 10. No prayers can be acceptable to God that are insincere; and such are the prayers of wicked men for salvation, for they do not really desire to be saved from sin. But the prayers of the inquirer after salvation are sincere; he really desires it. Still, however, I would remind you, that as long as you pray in an unconverted state, your prayers are only the operations of self-love, which, though not sinful, are not truly holy; they are but the cries of misery after relief, the desire of the soul after happiness; and, however frequently or fervently repeated, prefer no claim on God for his blessing. The sin lies not in praying; for, if sincere, there is no sin in crying to God for help; but in not believing. Instead, therefore, of leaving off prayer, or harassing your minds with doubts about the propriety of carrying it on, continue instant in prayer, believing at the same time the promise of mercy in Christ Jesus. You are to add to your prayer, faith; and it is doubtless your duty at once to believe: but if your soul lose not immediately its guilty

fears, still you are to go on praying for mercy, and for faith to receive it. It cannot be wrong for a soul to cry for mercy. With such light as you have, although it may not be such as is necessary to salvation, lift up your desire to God. Pray for more knowledge, stronger faith, and firmer hope. Prayer is your duty, and it is your privilege; and let no speculative difficulties have a moment's influence to induce you to suspend it. If you cannot yet pray as a believer, cry for mercy as a sinner. But do not remain in unbelief, supposing that prayer can be a substitute for faith; for, as I said before, so I repeat, God does not bind himself to answer any prayers but those of faith.

CHAPTER VIII.

DISCOURAGEMENTS WHICH PRESENT THEMSELVES AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF A RELIGIOUS COURSE.

The word of God teaches us to expect these. What means "the strait gate," but an entrance attended with difficulty? What means "counting the cost," but contemplating obstacles, and preparing to meet them? Bunyan knew the course to heaven, when he placed the slough of despond in the first stage of the journey. You are mistaken if you expect by one easy stride to reach the firm and solid ground beyond this dismal swamp. Sincerity will diminish difficulties and finally overcome them, but it will not prevent them. Prepare then for discouragement, for you will be sure to meet with it; and it is both wise and merciful to forewarn you of it, lest you should conclude that some strange thing has happened to you. But observe, no part of this discouragement comes from God. He interposes no obstacle, raises no difficulty, presents no objection. A doubt of his willingness to save, a suspicion of his mercy, would be fatal to your hopes. But all is clear ground, so far as he is concerned. Dwell on this thought, it is a blissful one; ponder it, before you go another step; arm yourselves to meet every discouragement, come from what quarter it may, with this convic-

tion, that God waits to be gracious; yes, like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, he is out, looking for you; his infinite mercy is in motion towards you; he comes to you faster than you go to him. What then is your discouragement?

1. The cold indifference, the repulsive shyness, of professing Christians. You thought that the very look of anxiety, the very countenance that seemed to say to their eyes, if not to their ears, "What shall I do to be saved?" would draw the sympathies of many upon you; instead of which, you are left without a friend to commiserate, guide, or soothe you, and are compelled, in the agony of your soul, to say, even to the multitude that go up to Zion, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? come, see, if there be any sorrow like unto mine. Will no man care for my soul?" Ah, my friend, let me tell you in the beginning of your career, that you cannot expect too little from man, nor too much from God. It is the scandal of the Church of Christ, and in some measure also of its ministers, that serious inquirers after salvation are shamefully neglected. But shall this discourage you? What, when all heaven is interested on your behalf? When Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are concerned for you? When the blessed angels are rejoicing over you, and flying on wings of love to minister to you, as an heir of salvation? Cast away your gloom, look to God; and if the neglect of Christians should lead you to a more simple dependence upon Christ, you will be a gainer in the end. Too many friends, and too much attention, might do you injury, by leading you to depend too much upon an arm of flesh.

2. Many are discouraged by witnessing the low state

of religion among professors. They see no counterpart to their own anxiety among those who have long borne the Christian name. While they themselves are crying, "What shall we do to be saved?" they hear little from the lips of many Christian professors, but, "What shall we eat or drink; wherewithal shall we be clothed; what is the news of the day; or what is the state of trade?" They see so much worldly-mindedness, so much imperfection of temper, so many things unworthy of the Christian character, that they can scarcely believe there is reality in religion, and are sometimes ready to give it all up as a mere name. Nay, from some of these very professors they receive plain hints that they are too anxious, too precise, too earnest and urgent. Oh, ye wicked professors! ye child-murderers! (for by what softer name can I call you, in thus attempting to strangle the children of God in their birth?) I beseech you to consider the mischief you are doing, and abandon this effort to extinguish the solicitude of souls beginning to feel the energies of spiritual life. And, ye inquirers after salvation, do not be discouraged. If these men are living below their profession, that is their business, not yours. Salvation is necessary for you, whether they are sincere and earnest in seeking it or not. It will be no compensation for the loss of your soul, to think that they lost theirs. If there were not yet one real Christian in all the world, this would be no excuse for your neglecting to become one. Look into the Bible, rather than to professors. Instead of giving up the matter, you should gather this inference from what you see, that it is no easy thing to be a Christian. Should the bad tempers, the unworthy conduct of professors induce you

to relinquish the pursuit of salvation, it will be poor consolation in the bottomless pit to look back upon the cause of your ruin.

3. You are, perhaps, discouraged by the prospect of opposition from your nearest friends. You see them all worldly, and plainly perceive that your real conversion to God will place you in direct opposition to them: that your becoming a Christian, and acting as such, will bring into your house the scene described by our Lord, Matt. x. 34–38. "Oh," say you, "how fearful is the prospect before me! my piety will sound a note of discord in a family where all has been peace till now, although a peace founded on a common disregard of religion; and will introduce confusion and strife where all has been union and harmony." "I must brave the anger of my husband," says the wife, "and perhaps alienate that heart, on which my spirit has hitherto reposed with such delight." Or, says the child, "I must seem to be disobedient to a parent, whom I have hitherto found it to be my duty and bliss to obey. Oh, can I do it? Is there no other way to heaven? Are there no milder terms of submission to the authority of Christ?" None, none whatever. I do not conceal that it is an awful alternative. I should be destitute of all sympathy, my friend, if I did not feel for you. But I dare not withdraw the cross. My soul would perish with yours, if I successfully attempted to persuade you that, in your circumstances, repentance, faith, the love of God, and all the other graces and virtues included in decided spiritual religion, could be dispensed with. God will not, cannot, relax his demands, and I dare not. Husband and wife, parent and child, houses and lands, worldly reputation, and the applause of men,

must all give place to Him. He demands the heart; and he has infinite compensation to make for all you sacrifice for him. He will make the crown infinitely more valuable than the cross is terrible. You may be, you ought to be, discreet in your profession; you must avoid all unnecessary opposition to the wishes of unconverted relatives; you should, if possible, be ten times more obliging, more devoted, more sweetly kind, in all other matters; you should return good for evil; you should exhibit the most undisturbed meekness; you should try to conquer violence by patience: but you must not, you dare not, give up your convictions; you must be willing to die of a broken heart, and by the wrongs of persecution, rather than give up your pursuit of salvation. Trust in God, he will support you. If he call you to be a martyr in this way, he will first give you a martyr's faith, and then a martyr's crown.

Let the following impressive fact be read by you with solemn awe.

"An accomplished and amiable young woman, in the town of ——, had been deeply affected by a sense of her spiritual danger. She was the only child of a fond and affectionate parent. The deep impressions which accompanied her discovery of guilt and depravity awakened all the jealousies of the father. He dreaded the loss of that sprightliness and vivacity which constituted the life of his domestic circle. He was startled by the answers which his questions elicited; while he foresaw, or thought he foresaw, an encroachment on the hitherto unbroken tranquillity of a deceived heart. Efforts were made to remove the cause of her disquietude; but they were such efforts as unsanctified wisdom directed. The Bible at last, oh how little may a parent know the far reaching of the deed, when he snatches the word of life from the hand of a child! the Bible, and other books of religion, were removed from her possession, and their place was supplied by works of fiction. An excursion of pleasure was proposed, and declined; an offer of gayer amusement shared the same fate; promises, remonstrances, and threatenings followed. But

the father's infatuated perseverance at last brought compliance. Alas! how little may a parent be aware that he is adorning his offspring with the fillets of death, and leading them to the sacrifice, like a follower of Moloch! The end was accomplished; all thoughts of piety, and all concern for the immortal future, vanished together. But oh, how in less than a year was the gaudy deception exploded! The fascinating and gay L—— M —— was prostrated by a fever, that bade defiance to medical skill. The approach of death was unequivocal, and the countenance of every attendant fell, as if they had heard the flight of his arrow. I see, even now, that look directed to the father, by the dying martyr of folly. The glazing eye was dim in hopelessness; and yet there seemed a something in its expiring rays that told reproof, and tenderness, and terror in the same glance. And that voice, its tone was decided, but sepulchral still, 'My father! —Last year I would have sought the Redeemer. Fa—ther—your child is'——Eternity heard the remainder of the sentence; for it was not uttered in time."* In connexion with this striking fact, read the following portions of Scripture. Matt. v, 10–12; x, 21-39; 1 Cor. iv, 9–13; 2 Tim. ii, 10–13; Heb. x, 23–39; xi; 1 Peter i, 6–9; iv, 12–19; 2 Peter ii, 20–22; Rev. vii, 9–17.

4. The discouragements of others lie nearer home still, they find them all in their own hearts. The feeling with many is, that they make no progress; their views gain nothing in clearness, their convictions in depth, or their hearts in peace. They are neither more convinced, or more comforted; neither more spiritual, nor more decided than they were; and they are sometimes seized with fits of hopeless despondency, and are ready to give up the whole matter. Such a state of mind is very common, and a very perilous one, and affords ground for real alarm. Your duty and safety lie in considering that the fault is in yourself, and not in God; you, you are to blame: you are perhaps halting between two opinions; you are still probably endeavouring to compromise between religion and the world; you are not giving that fixed, devoted

* "Letters to a Friend."

attention to the subject which it demands. You must, therefore, go afresh to the work. You must feel just like a man who has been swimming in a tide that is bearing him further from the shore, and who feels that it is necessary to make more vigorous efforts, or he is inevitably lost. Give up!! No, anything but that. To perish now would be to perish terribly. While you are carrying on those heartless efforts, you may die, and in what a state!

But, perhaps, your complaints are the result of deep anxiety, which makes you think there is no advance till you are really established in the full knowledge, faith, and hope of the gospel. To this established state you ought to come, and to come without delay; and nothing hinders you from coming to it, but an evil heart of unbelief; and to this point I press you to come. But should your knowledge not grow as rapidly, nor your peace increase as solidly, as you expected or desired; should you feel yourself slow of growth in all that appertains to happy Christian experience; do not sink into a heartless and wretched frame, a kind of desponding pursuit of salvation, as of an object that you were never likely to obtain. What you should do is immediately to repent, and believe the gospel; you cannot come to enlarged views and to settled peace without this. Going back, or giving up, is just the last thing you should think of. To turn back now, would be to turn back when near the cross. Look up, sinner! the stupendous object is before you close by you; look up at the Crucified One. It is further back to your former state of indifference, than to the place of refuge. Just as you are, with no more knowledge, no more

religious feeling, no more comfort, at once believe. Look up, I say, again, at the cross; it is distinctly visible to the eye of faith, from every point of the road along which you are journeying, and may be viewed any moment by him who will look that way. It is the sight of that dear object that will present every other in a right light, and invigorate every grace that belongs to true religion.

But may it not be, that your obstructions to a more rapid growth arise from some specific cause, some sin indulged, some corruption cherished? Is there not some sacrifice which you are unwilling to make, something which you are unwilling to surrender, although your judgment tells you the surrender ought to be made, and your conscience demands it? You must give up the forbidden thing, or your growth in grace is impossible: that one sin will, like a concealed worm at the root of a flower, eat out the very life of your religion, and cause it to droop, wither, and die. Is it a companion, from whom you are unwilling to separate, but whose society is hindering your progress? And will you sacrifice your soul's salvation, heaven, and eternal glory, all that is dear to you as an immortal creature, and deliberately choose everlasting perdition, for that sin, or that friend? Take your choice between heaven and sacrifice, hell and present gratification. Immortal man! Pause and ponder: canst thou hesitate? There is both awful guilt and imminent peril in every moment's delay. What if God should, as he justly may, send forth the command, "He is joined to idols; let him alone." Decide, then; decide at once. The moment in which thou readest this page may decide it:

for if thou art unwilling to give up thy sinful practice or sinful companion, God may, from this moment, give up thee.

But, perhaps, the slowness of your growth in knowledge and in grace may arise from another cause, I mean your neglect of the promised influence and help of the Holy Spirit. You have been too self-confident, and are now feeling the consequence of it. At one time, perhaps, your impressions were deep, your convictions strong, your frame of mind lively, and your feelings much excited; but you have suffered yourself to be seduced by Satan, who took advantage of those things, into a spirit of self-confidence and self-dependence. You have forgotten that in you there is no good thing; and have forsaken the fountain of living waters. You have never doubted the necessity of the Spirit's influence, but you have neglected it. You have grieved the Holy Ghost, and he has suspended that gracious aid which you so little valued. You have striven, but it has been in your own strength: and now you find that strength to be weakness itself. Now, then, profit by your error; and commit your soul, not only into the hands of Christ for pardon, but into the hands of the Spirit for sanctification. Now, lean upon that Divine power which worketh in us both to will and to do. Live in the Spirit; walk in the Spirit; pray in the Spirit; strive in the Spirit. Open your heart to his gracious influence; and let it be a feeling, as well as a conviction, that your spiritual life has no existence separate from his indwelling and inworking within you.

It may be, however, that this discouragement and

complaint of a slow growth in religion are altogether unfounded, and are the result of disappointment, operating upon an humble or a sanguine mind. You may have expected at once to emerge from the thick darkness of an unconverted state, into the very noontide brightness of a full establishment in faith, hope, and love. You expected, probably, by one stride, or rather bound, to reach the position of experienced Christians. But, remember, that both in nature and in grace the works of God come gradually to maturity. There is first the babe; then the young man; then the adult. What a feeble, glimmering spark of life is there sometimes in a new-born child; it is difficult to determine whether it is alive or dead; and even when unequivocal signs of life appear, what vigilant care is necessary to preserve the spark from being extinguished. Such has been the unpromising condition in which many a strong and long-lived man has commenced his existence. How analogous to this is the work of God in the soul. So, again, with the growth of corn, there is first the blade; then the stalk; then the ear: and as it is in the field of nature, so is the growth of religion in the heart of man. We must not despise the "day of small things," either in ourselves or others, for God does not. It is said of our Divine Redeemer, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd;" and in his flock there are lambs which can neither travel fast nor far; and what will he do with them? "He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom;" not on his shoulder, the emblem of strength, but in his bosom, the image of tender love; "and shall gently lead those that are with young;" those that are burdened with many fears and

painful apprehensions. How kindly did he forbear with the dulness, infirmities, and mistakes of his disciples; how gently did he correct the errors and sustain the minds of the two friends on their sad and gloomy walk to Emmaus, and keep alive the last glimmering spark of hope in their bosoms just when it was ready to expire. How graciously, in his addresses to the seven churches in Asia, did he mention all the good he could find among them, not overlooking even the "little strength" that was left in that of Philadelphia. Think of this, disheartened inquirer. Thy dawn of knowledge shall shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day; thy infantile strength will grow to manly power; thy tender blade of piety shall become the full corn in the ear. Thou art looking to a Saviour who "will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." Weak grace is real grace, and is in connexion with an infinite source in His fulness, who is the God of all grace, and who giveth more grace. It is well to be humble, and to think meanly of your attainments; but remember, trees are not dead because they are not at once laden with fruit. I say not these things to paralyze your exertions after greater attainments, for he who is satisfied with the grace he has, has in reality none; but to check despondency, and prevent that disheartening sense of deficiency, which benumbs every exertion by extinguishing hope.

5. Great discouragement has been experienced by others on account of relapses and backslidings into actual sins.

It is, I admit, a grievous aggravation of sin, to fall into it after men have been awakened and convinced:

and as there is much danger of this, the word of God contains many awful warnings against it, which have been already referred to. We ought, therefore, to use the greatest watchfulness, and to present the most fervent prayers to be kept from these sins; and our vigilance should be doubled, in regard to those temptations to which we are most exposed from the peculiarity of our constitution, situation, or other circumstances. Yet sometimes even those who have sincerely and earnestly engaged in the pursuit of salvation have been, through a want of watchfulness, betrayed again into sins from which they had been delivered. In such cases, the backslider, under the united influence of remorse and despondency, is apt to give up all for lost, and, under the idea that he shall never obtain salvation, renounce the further pursuit of it. Now I would say to such, that while you cannot be too deeply humbled for such relapses, you ought not to think that your case is desperate. If such sins could not be pardoned, and such sinners could not be restored, who then could be saved? But it is not so much a doubt of pardon for the past, you say, that discourages you, as a fear of preservation for the future. You find your heart so treacherous, your purposes so frail, your corruptions so strong, and your temptations so great; you have been so often victorious, and afterwards have been so often conquered, that you despair of success. What mean those despondding expressions? They seem to say, either that there is no help for you but in yourselves, or that God is not able to deliver you. Both are false. There is no help at all in you, but there is all-sufficient help in God. Take courage, sinner, take courage; God is almighty. Humble

yourself under his mighty hand for the past, and then rise up and lean upon his mighty arm for the future. The blood of Christ can cleanse the conscience from the guilt of past sin, and the grace of the Holy Spirit can preserve you from the commission of future sin: the backsliding can be forgiven, and the backslider himself restored, strengthened, confirmed, and made more than conqueror, as thousands have already been.

CHAPTER IX.

CAUTIONS.

1. Do not seek to relieve your solicitude, or settle your religious peace, by making a profession of religion, and receiving the sacrament.

This is done by many persons, who, after having remained for a long time in unrelieved solicitude, and after having tried all methods of gaining peace but the right one, determine to enter into church fellowship, and to receive the Lord's supper, with the hope of obtaining that comfort which they have hitherto sought in vain. But does not this look like a self-righteous dependence upon duties? In what way can the sacrament give relief to a burdened conscience? Is there anything more meritorious in that ordinance than in any other? Perhaps you say, that the emblems of the body and blood of our Lord will more deeply and powerfully impress the mind through the medium of the senses. So they will; but then the mind must be in a state of knowledge and faith to receive the impression: and I am now supposing that you are not yet in that state; that you have never yet committed your soul into the hands of Christ for full and free salvation; and in such a state of mind, to go to the sacrament or the church for peace is to expect that it can do that for you,

which the work of Christ cannot do. Is not the blood of Christ able to take away your sins? Is anything necessary for your justification to be added to the righteousness of the Saviour? What can the sacrament do for you, if that be insufficient to save you? The sinner that seeks to lose his burden of guilt anywhere, whether it be in the prayer-meeting, or at the sacramental table, except at the cross of Christ, is in delusion. It is possible, nay probable, that by going to the Lord's supper you may feel for the time an abatement of your solicitude; your imagination may be excited; your feelings moved; and, mistaking this for faith, you may have peace; but it will be a false or a transient one. Either you will fall asleep in self-deception, or your anxiety will soon return, increased by an apprehension that you have added sin to sin, by receiving the Lord's supper in an unprepared state of mind. This institution is intended, not to give peace to unbelievers, but consolation and edification to believers; not to bring us into a state of faith, but to be received in faith; not to remove the burden of sin from the conscience, but to keep in remembrance that Great Sacrifice by which the burden is removed. True it is, that God may reveal himself to the sinner in the breaking of bread; but the question is not what he may do, but what he may be expected to do: and even in case he does, what is it that relieves the conscience of its burden, and gives peace to the mind? Surely not the sacrament itself, but the great truth of Christ's sacrifice for sin, as set forth by it. I do not intend by these remarks to insist on the necessity of a full assurance of hope, as a necessary qualification for a

right reception of the Lord's supper; but certainly there ought to be real, even if it be but weak, faith; for how else can we discern the Lord's body? Nothing, no, nothing, can give the guilty conscience peace, or take away our sins, but the atoning blood of Christ. And to pass by the cross of the Redeemer, without peace of mind, in the hope of finding it in the sacrament, is unquestionably to depend for acceptance with God upon our own religious duties, instead of the work of the Saviour. The frame of mind in which we should receive the memorials of redeeming love, is that of an humble, thankful, and peaceful reliance upon the mediation of our Divine Lord for pardon and eternal life.

2. It is of great consequence, that in the early stages of your religious experience, you should abstain as much as possible from a spirit of controversy.

Your great concern is to find out the path of eternal happiness, and enter upon it. Salvation is your great object, or rather the way of obtaining it. Your cry is, "Life, eternal life;" and your course should be direct to the cross of the Redeemer. Nothing but what relates immediately to your reconciliation with God should be allowed to engage your attention. Suffer not your mind, then, to be diverted from such subjects as the new birth, or the justification of your soul before God, to the thorny controversies about baptism, church government, or even the doctrines of theology. Take up nothing controversially. The subjects of disputation are strong meat for adults, which will choke and destroy the babe in Christ; and even the former cannot feed much upon it, without having their spiritual health impaired, and their souls filled with rank and unhealthy

humours. Or, to change the metaphor, the man locked up in the condemned cell, under sentence of death, but who has hope of pardon, and is taking steps to obtain it, suffers not his mind to be drawn aside from his condition, by the questions which may be very properly discussed by the citizen and the patriot. If any one were to carry him a newspaper, and endeavour to engage him as a partisan in some political strife, he would reply, with a look of astonishment that such topics should be intruded on his notice, "What are these matters to a man condemned to die? Assist me in gaining a pardon, and you will do me some service: but do not engage for such matters a moment of that time which should be devoted to save me from death. When I am restored to liberty, I can think of politics, but not now." So let the inquirer act, and say, in reference to those proselyting but injudicious zealots, who by controversy would meet and turn away the solicitude which is seeking the way to salvation. You can study these topics hereafter, but at present, "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein; and ye shall find rest for your souls." Read your Bible and plain practical books, rather than controversial ones; be much in prayer and silent meditation; preserve a tranquil and unruffled mind, for it is in the stillness of devotional feeling, and the peace of holy reconciliation, and the quiet of untroubled thoughts, that the true light shines into the soul, and the small still voice of the Spirit of peace is heard. Many, adopting a different course, have plunged into the depths of controversy as soon as they became concerned about religion, and have lost

charity in their professed pursuit after truth; and instead of becoming humble, holy, peaceful Christians, have turned out conceited, stormy, and restless polemics. In an early stage of their career the penitent was lost in the zealot; in their subsequent progress they took up with a religion of opinions, instead of pious feelings; and finished their course, it may be feared, not amidst the light and love of heaven, but in the world of unsanctified knowledge, where the devils believe and tremble.

3. It is necessary to caution you against a spirit of curiosity, as well as controversy.

You ought to seek after knowledge, as I have already stated. The Scripture abounds in admonitions on this head, and in reproofs to those who repose in indolence upon the lap of ignorance. Diligence in endeavours to grow in knowledge has the promise of success. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." But this is altogether distinct from a spirit of unhallowed curiosity. The temper which I am anxious to guard you against shows itself in various ways; sometimes in rambling about from place to place of public worship. In some cases, this arises from that restlessness and uneasiness of mind, which is common to persons in their first religious experience. Like Noah's dove, they wander about, seeking rest, but find none; or, rather like a person in a fever, forgetting that the cause of disquietude is in themselves, they continually change their place, in the vain hope of obtaining that rest which can never come till their condition is altered. Finding no comfort under one preacher, they impute the blame to his sermons, and ramble off to another,

under whose ministry they gain a little ease for a while; but merely by having their attention drawn away for a season from its usual track of thought. The novelty soon ceases, and he is forsaken for another, till they have gone the whole round of places within their reach, and they leave the last as far from peace as they were when they left the first. Guard against this error, and learn that it is in Christ, and Christ alone, and not in any particular place of worship, or under any particular ministry, that you can find rest and peace. It is the glorious doctrine of a free, full, and present salvation in Christ, that must be the pillow of your poor aching and restless head, and not any particular manner or method of representing that doctrine.

But this rambling spirit is sometimes merely the eagerness of curiosity. Some young converts are ever to be seen in any place where anything out of the ordinary course is going on; they are to be seen at all times, all places, and all occasions, when and where a popular preacher is to be heard, or any of the stimulating varieties which abound in the religious world are to be found. This habit, however, is not friendly to the growth of religious feeling, or the progress of a work of grace in the soul. Even the public meetings of our religious institutions are not altogether the best atmosphere for infant piety to breathe. There is a tenderness, a delicacy, and a pensiveness, in the feelings of a mind recently awakened to a state of religious concern, which finds little that is congenial in the comparatively secular aspect of those assemblies. Eloquence and anecdote, as they are usually employed on such occasions, have but little that is calculated to deepen conviction, or relieve

anxiety, but often much to diminish the one, and divert the other. If, indeed, our anniversaries were or could be conducted with that solemnity and seriousness which their object seems to require, then might inquirers after salvation attend them as one of the means of grace; but perhaps this can hardly be looked for, and therefore do I deliberately say to them, Do not at present attend such meetings too frequently; you ought rather to court retirement, to nurse reflection, to seek to grow in deeper seriousness, and to surrender yourselves to the dominion of conscience, and the teaching of God the Holy Spirit. Your present business is your own salvation; and when you have found that, and as one of the evidences of having found it, you must feel anxious for the salvation of others, and unite with your fellow-Christians in the various schemes of benevolent enterprise.

But curiosity may be indulged in another way, I mean a disposition to pry into the deep mysteries, the hidden things, the unrevealed secrets of God. Even the most established Christians, yea, the profoundest and most philosophic divines, may and do sometimes push their inquiries too far, and presumptuously put forth their hand to draw aside the veil of the holy of holies. But you especially should abstain from this; such questions as the origin of moral evil; the reconcileableness of God's foreknowledge with the freedom of man; the Divine decrees; the symbolical and unfulfilled prophecies, with other subjects of equal difficulty, are most unsuitable for you in your present state of mind. What you have to do with is, the simplest and plainest truths of the gospel. Your concern is, to

obtain pardon, peace, and hope; and to do this you must not raise mists and clouds of metaphysics around the cross, but look at it as it is presented in the word of God; and as it there appears, clearly, simply, and alone. It has been said, that "in the Scripture there are depths in which an elephant may swim, and shallows which a lamb may ford:" your business is at present with the shallows, and to venture into the depths is a perilous attempt, which I would not advise you to make.

4. You should beware of setting up other standards of personal religion than the word of God, and making the religious experience of other Christians a test of the truth and reality of your own.

The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the true standard of godliness; and provided your views, feelings, and conduct are conformed to this, it is of no consequence that they do not harmonize exactly with what others experience. Not that there is any radical disagreement in the real piety of genuine Christians; but, with substantial agreement, there may be circumstantial differences; there may be unity of genus, yet variety of species. All true Christians love God, hate sin, feel Christ precious, addict themselves to prayer, live holily; but they may not have been brought to this state by the same methods, or carry it forward to the same degree of perfection. In reading religious biography you will see great dissimilarity in the experience of God's people, and will be sometimes in danger of sinking into great distress, because you do not feel in all points as the saints did whose lives are before you. When you meet with instances of more than usual elevation of personal

religion, of nearer approaches than common to perfection, do not conclude that you have no piety because you do not equal them, but rather see what you may become; be humbled that you are no more like them, and let their examples stimulate your energies, but not extinguish your hopes, or paralyze your efforts.

5. I caution you not to allow your convictions to be shaken, nor your mind to be staggered, by those instances of backsliding or apostasy which sometimes occur among professors of religion, and even such as were once accounted eminent professors.

It does, indeed, often give an awful shock to the feelings and the stedfastness of inquirers, to witness the fall of those who once stood high in the affection of believers, and the esteem of the world. Not a few, it is to be feared, have from that time gone back, and walked the ways of God no more. But how irrational, how guilty is such conduct! Did not Christ forewarn us to expect such instances, when he said, "Woe to the world because of offences, for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh?" Such cases, therefore, are but the accomplishment of a prophecy, and prove, like other fulfilled predictions, the inspiration of Him by whom they were delivered. And they prove, in another way also, the Divine origin of the Christian religion; for if it had not been of God, it must have been destroyed long since by the misconduct of its professed friends, from which it has stood in far greater danger than from the enmity of its avowed foes. Counterfeits are a presumptive proof of the excellence of that which they profess to imitate, for who is at the trouble of imitating

what is worthless? Do not, then, permit your mind to be affected by the conduct of false professors; at least, in any other way than that of deep grief that such things should occur to them; and of anxious, prayerful care, that they may never be repeated in you. Be this your supplication,

"Lord, let not all my hopes be vain,
Create my heart entirely new,
Which hypocrites could ne'er attain,
Which false apostates never knew."

CHAPTER X.

ENCOURAGEMENTS TO INQUIRERS.

Among all the objects of human desire and pursuit, there is not one which we have so much encouragement to seek, or to hope for; there is not one, in reference to which despondency is so much out of place; there is not one, to which indubitable certainty so surely belongs, as the salvation of the soul, if it be sincerely desired, and scripturally sought for. The whole Bible is one vast encouragement to seek for eternal life; the death of Christ is another; and the existence and history of the church of God upon earth is a third. Men may despond of gaining wealth, or fame, or rank, or health; but no man out of hell need despond of gaining salvation. It is nearer to us, and more within our reach, than any other blessing we can name or think of. Our feelings in regard to earthly possessions can never rise higher than hope; but, in regard to salvation, they may take the character of certainty, provided we use the proper means.

1. It is one great source of encouragement, that whatever difficulties lie in our way, all centre in ourselves.

God will not, and Satan and the world cannot, hinder our salvation. There is no obstacle which is in

itself insurmountable; no enemy invincible; no objection unanswerable. If a man had any other object in view, for the attainment of which there existed no difficulty out of himself, he would feel greatly encouraged, and be ready to congratulate himself as tolerably certain of success. Reader, the only difficulty in the way of thy salvation is in thyself. True it is, there are many and great ones there, the least of which thine own strength is too weak to surmount; but the Lord God Omnipotent has engaged to thee his power, if thou art willing to be helped; and therefore, in this view of the case, even thine own weakness is no insurmountable obstacle. The only question is, "Art thou sincerely willing and anxious to be saved?" Once made truly willing, what is to hinder thy salvation? Dwell again and again on this simple idea, for it is full of encouragement. "The only difficulty in my way to heaven is that which exists in my own heart, and God is willing to remove that."

2. It is a great encouragement, that God's mind is so full of goodwill towards us, and that his heart is so set upon our salvation.

If we had reason to suppose that he was unfriendly towards us; that he was reluctant to save us; that his mind was upon the balance between friendship and hostility; that it needed much importunity to entreat him to be merciful, and that he granted us salvation unwillingly and grudgingly; this would indeed be discouraging, and might induce a fear that we should not succeed. But the contrary is the fact. "God is love." "He is gracious, and full of compassion;" "is rich in mercy;" and "plenteous in mercy." He even "delighteth in mercy." "He is not willing that any should

perish, but that all should come to repentance." "He delighteth not in the death of a sinner, but would rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." Yea, he confirms it by an oath, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Yea, it is said that the salvation of sinners is so much his delight, that he has engaged it shall be carried on: "the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands." Now "by the pleasure of the Lord" we are to understand the salvation of sinners. Nor is this all, for it is affirmed that "the Lord taketh pleasure in those that hope in his mercy." We cannot please him better, than by asking him to save us, and by expecting salvation at his hands. Now, inquirer, take this delighful view of God's dispensation towards you; for this is the right one. He is love; he has an infinite delight in making his creatures happy. It is true his love is a holy love, and therefore the more to be depended upon. Having made provision, in the gift and mediation of Christ, for saving you in a way consistent with his truth, and holiness, and justice, and thus removed every obstacle out of the way of the flowing forth of his love towards you, he is infinitely intent on saving and blessing you. All your dark, desponding thoughts of him are unjust, and injurious to his mercy. To conceive of him as unwilling to save you, is a slander upon his love; a false and foul calumny upon his grace. If he were with difficulty persuaded to save you, why did he give his Son to die for you? The salvation of your soul, the salvation of millions of souls, the salvation of the whole world, is not so great an act of love as the gift of Jesus Christ. After this you need not wonder at any thing, nor doubt any thing. "He

that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" You have God's mind, and heart, and purpose, and attributes, all on the side of your salvation; and is not this encouragement enough?

3. Consider the mind, character, and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He came on purpose to save sinners; he has done everything necessary for their salvation; he is able to save to the uttermost; he has invited all to him for salvation; he has promised to save them; and will he now fail? Think of the glory of his person, God manifest in the flesh; think of the design of his incarnation, sufferings, and death; think of the perfection of his work in satisfying Divine justice, magnifying the law, sustaining the moral government of God in all its purity, dignity, and effectiveness; think of the love of his heart, the power of his arm, and the connexion between his mediatorial renown and the salvation of sinners; think of his universal dominion over angels, devils, men, nature, providence; think of his continued and prevailing intercession at the right hand of God; think of his universal invitations, and his absolute promises. What topics these, what sources of encouragement! How much is his heart fixed upon the salvation of sinners! This was the joy that was set before him, and for which he endured the cross, despising the shame; this is the travail of his soul, and by it its ineffable longings will be satisfied. Your salvation is his business, and the accomplishment of it will be his reward. If he could be conceived to be indifferent to your salvation, will he be indifferent to his own glory? Will he belie his own name, and destroy his own work,

and falsify his promises, and throw away his own reward, and impair his own renown as a Saviour, by refusing to save you? Is it probable? Is it possible?

4. Dwell upon the infinite and all-sufficient resources of the Holy Ghost.

This Divine Agent is as omnipotent to sanctify, as the power of God was in the beginning to create the heavens and the earth. If you were cast upon your own resources, you might well exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things?" and abandon the hope of salvation for fixed and remediless despair. But the economy of redemption provides no less for the effectual application of its benefits by the work of the Holy Ghost, than it does for the procurement of them by the mediation of Christ; and the claims of the Godhead were not more completely foreseen and provided for by the latter, than all the weakness, want, and wickednesses of the human heart, were foreseen and provided for also by the former. There is a glorious completeness in the scheme of redemption; even the suspicious eye of unbelief, and the searching look of a troubled and anxious conscience, can find no defect in it. The blindness of your judgment; the hardness and deceitfulness of your heart; the perversity of your will; the deadness of your conscience; the wildness of your imagination; the disorder of your passions; your backwardness to good; your proneness to evil; your reluctance to determine; your irresoluteness; your timidity; your fickleness; all, all have been foreseen and provided for, in the inexhaustible riches of grace in the blessed Spirit of God. On those riches you are encouraged to rely and to draw, without measure and without end. You are not required to act, to speak, to will, to feel, to think, except in depend-

ence on that Divine Agent. You are commanded to look to him for every variety of operation, and for every degree of influence, and for every timely putting forth of his power and wisdom, that the exigency of your circumstances may require. Read especially the following passages of Scripture, and ask if there be not encouragement enough in them? Luke xi, 9–13; Rom. viii, 10–17; James i, 5, 6; Gal. v, 22, 23; John xvi, 7–15; 2 Cor. xii, 9, 10.

5. Dwell upon the general complexion of the word of God, as so largely made up of commands to seek salvation; invitations to accept of it; promises to insure it; and descriptions, setting forth its blessings in their vastness, variety, suitableness, and certainty.

If the whole Bible were to be summed up in one short comprehensive sentence, it would be this: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Or, reducing it still more, it would all be contained in that one word, of immense, infinite, and eternal import, Salvation. Everything in the Bible tends to this as its centre: here all the lines of history and prophecy, of the Old Testament and the New, of the law and the gospel meet. Salvation glimmers amidst the clouds and shadows of the Levitical economy, and shines forth in all its glory from the facts of the Christian dispensation. It was the subject that dropped in sweet but mystic accents from the lips of Mercy on the despairing minds of our first parents; it was the subject which was hinted in the softer tones of the ceremonial law, when the thunders of the decalogue had ceased to terrify the affrighted Israelites at Sinai; it was the subject to which the prophet struck his harp, it was fore-

shadowed in the Psalms of David, and the rapt ecstasies of Isaiah; it was the subject which angels sang on the night of Christ's nativity; it was the subject which evangelists recorded in their histories, and apostles described in their epistles; and which even the awful visions of the Apocalypse seem designed to magnify and illustrate, by representing it as the point of harmony between heaven and earth, and the link that connects the events of time with the glories of eternity. The Bible, then, inquirer, presents salvation to your attention, and employs all its fulness to attract, all its authority to command, and all its graciousness to invite you, to its pursuit; and even uses its threatenings and its thunders for the merciful purpose of driving you for refuge to the hope set before you in the gospel. Is not this encouragement?

6. The unchangeableness of God's nature and covenant is a source of boundless hope.

He has invited, he has commanded, he has promised; and he is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent; but he is the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of a change. Immutable in his nature, he is equally so in his purpose and in his promise. Whom he loves, he loves to the end. Could you examine the secret lists of his friends, you would find neither blots nor erasures there. "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate, to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the Firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also

justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Sublime language! Triumphant boast! Inspired and inspiring exultation! Heaven heard it, and approved; hell heard it, and trembled; and let saints on earth hear it, and rejoice. Inquirer, be comforted; where a good work is begun in the heart, it shall be carried on until the day of Jesus Christ. The Spirit, who builds for himself a temple in the soul of man, will not leave it unfinished, nor suffer it to sink to ruins after he has finished it. Though enemies without may oppose and ridicule, and though enemies within may stir up occasional insurrection and interruption, the work shall go on, till the top-stone shall be brought forth amidst the shouts of "Grace, grace." The purpose of God must stand, in spite of all the force or fraud, the power and malice of earth and hell combined. Is not this encouragement?

7. Consider the sympathies and prayers of fellow-Christians.

Discouraged as you may have been by the indifference and lukewarmness of some, let it comfort you to know that all are not thus. There are myriads of holy ministers of Christ, and millions of pious men and

women from age to age, pouring out their fervent supplications to God, for those who are inquiring the way to Zion with their faces thitherward. Have you not heard your case borne with tenderness, and minuteness, and earnestness, upon the hearts of your friends and by your ministers? Have you not thus found the feelings of the assembly poured in a full tide of sympathy into your heart? Yes, and not only do the "Spirit and the bride say, Come," in this public manner: not only does the voice of united prayer commend you to God; but, in thousands of closets of praying men, you are commended to God, and Divine grace is implored on your souls. In those sad and solemn moments, when you are disheartened and ready to faint, when, instead of prayer, you can send forth nothing but groanings which cannot be uttered, then think, with pleasure and with hope, upon the many intercessors who are praying for you, and "thank God, and take courage."

8. Take encouragement from the consideration of the ministry of angels; for "are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" What offices they perform we know not, perhaps because it is not safe for us to know; why they are employed we know not; or what is the extent of our obligation we know not: but the bare fact that such instruments are employed about you, such attendants are engaged upon your interests, such spectators are witnessing you, such friends are sympathizing with you, is a sweetly pleasing and encouraging idea. They have already rejoiced over your conversion, if indeed you are converted; and have had you consigned to their care, to minister to your welfare. You may be despised by men, but you are regarded by angels; you may be neglected

by men, but you are attended by angels; you may be dismissed by men, but you are associated with angels; you may be opposed and persecuted by men, but angels are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto your salvation. Is not this encouragement?

9. Consider how many who were once tried, disheartened, weak, as you are now, have been carried in safety through all their difficulties, and are now before the throne of God in glory everlasting.

The apostle John seems to have set open the doors of the heavenly temple, that the sights within might beam upon our eyes, and the sounds just undulate on our ears. "After this I beheld, and lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." And who are they that send forth such strains? They that had come "out of great tribulation, and had washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They were once upon earth; once men of like passions with yourself; once beginning their religious course as you now are;

> "Once they were mourning here below,
> And wet their couch with tears;
> They wrestled hard, as we do now,
> With sins, and doubts, and fears."

There is not a burden that oppresses your heart, but oppressed theirs; there is not a fear that agitates your mind, but agitated theirs; there is not a temptation

that assails you, but assailed them; there is not an obstacle that terrifies you, but terrified them; they were once as ignorant, as weak, as sinful, as timid, as discouraged, as you are now; there is not a sorrow, a perplexity, or a danger with which you are painfully familiar, but they passed through before you. But there they are in heaven, more than conquerors over all these things, through him that loved them. He that saved them has engaged to save you; nor is his ear heavy, nor his arm shortened. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith."

10. Let the magnitude of the blessing you are seeking, and the prospect of its consummation in eternal glory, encourage you.

You are seeking salvation, a word which none but the mind of God can comprehend, for it includes, as I have already said, what is infinite and eternal. It will bless you for both worlds, this and the next. In the present life, it will bestow upon you the pardon of all your sins; the justification of your persons; the renewal and sanctification of your nature; adoption into the family of God; the Spirit of adoption; it will be the guardian of your reputation; the protector of your property; an auxiliary to your health; a spring of comfort in the dreariest situation; a light in the darkest scene of distress; a companion in the deepest solitude; a counsellor in every perplexity; a help in weakness; a check in temptation; it will associate you with the

redeemed and holy people of God; conduct you in honour through the changing scenes of life; attend you to the verge of eternity; soften your dying pillow; assuage the agony of separation; and cheer you amidst the agonies of death, with the hopes of immortality. And all this is but the prelude, the earnest, and the foretaste of what awaits you beyond the grave. What that is, should be told only in the words of the Spirit of God; for "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." "Father," said our Lord, "I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." "So shall we ever be with the Lord." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." "To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life." "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; for the things which are not seen are eternal." "Who hath begotten us to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." "After this, I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God

which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth upon the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Anxious inquirer after salvation, take courage, look upward to heaven, and onward to eternal glory, and see what thou art seeking, and what thou art encouraged to expect.

CHRISTIAN PROGRESS:

A SEQUEL TO THE ANXIOUS INQUIRER AFTER SALVATION DIRECTED AND ENCOURAGED.

"Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before."

PHILIPPIANS iii, 13.

"Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord."

Hosea vi, 3.

TO THE MEMORY OF

William Freeman Lloyd, Esq.,

WHOSE INVALUABLE SERVICES

For a period of Thirty-Seven Years in connexion with the

Religious Tract Society

SO MATERIALLY CONTRIBUTED IN HIS DAYS OF HEALTH TO THE

PROSPERITY AND USEFULNESS OF

THAT IMPORTANT INSTITUTION; AND WHO AMIDST

SUFFERING AND RETIREMENT

STILL CONTINUED HIS OCCASIONAL EFFORTS FOR ITS INTERESTS,

THIS WORK,

WHICH WAS UNDERTAKEN AT HIS SUGGESTION,

And on which he bestowed some of the Last Moments of his Life,

Is Inscribed

WITH SENTIMENTS OF MOURNFUL ESTEEM AND REGARD

BY HIS SINCERE AND SURVIVING FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

The history of this little Work possesses a mournful and solemn interest. It owes its existence to one of whom it must now be said, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." Some months ago I received a letter from my dear and long-continued friend, William Freeman Lloyd, Esq., once the invaluable agent of the Religious Tract Society, suggesting the desirableness of a small volume to form a Sequel to the "Anxious Inquirer," and expressing a wish that I would undertake it. At first I put aside the idea as calling for what appeared to me to be superfluous labour; there being already books of that description even, perhaps, to abundance. It was still urged upon me by my much esteemed friend, on the ground that the extensive circulation and favour which the "Anxious Inquirer" had obtained, might possibly secure for a treatise written by the same author, and intended to be a sequel to it, more attention than the productions of some other writers would receive, especially if its title and contents should set forth a connexion between the two.

During a season of indisposition, which confined me pretty much for some days to my chamber or my

study, the subject came under re-consideration. I communed about it "with my own heart upon my bed," and also with Him "from whom all good counsel, all just thoughts, and all holy desires do proceed;" and the result was a determination to comply with the suggestion of Mr. Lloyd. The plan was in part drawn and the general idea of the subject revolved, while my head was upon my pillow, and during the silent watches of the night; and my first business on my restoration was to commit to paper the thoughts which had passed through my mind in the season of seclusion.

The Tract Society, according to their undeviating plan of submitting all their publications to the careful examination of their own Committee, or to some one appointed by them, committed the work to the revision and approval of Mr Lloyd, then in retirement through long-continued indisposition. Sheet after sheet passed under his critical review, till the last, which contained the preface and a dedication to himself, came back with a short note expressive of his gratification that his name would thus be publicly associated with mine. In consequence of an unexpected delay in the supply of paper, the striking off of this last sheet was delayed till the very morning when intelligence of his death arrived, and it came just in time before the press was set to work, to enable me to pay this tribute of affectionate respect to the memory of one with whom I had been in private somewhat intimately associated, and whom I so much respected for his talents, admired for his usefulness, and loved for his virtues. It will ever be a grateful recollection that one of the last, if not the very last of his services to the Society whose interests he

so tenderly loved and so efficiently promoted, was to examine on its behalf this production of my pen, and fruit of his own suggestion.

I have determined, that though his decease took place before the printing of the Work, the Dedication which he read and approved shall remain, with only such alterations as make it a tribute of respect to his memory, instead of a token of esteem for the living man.

"The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance."

J. A. J.

April 28, 1853.

INTRODUCTION.

THE PERSONS FOR WHOSE BENEFIT THIS WORK IS INTENDED, AND TO WHOM IT IS ADDRESSED.

It is the confession and lamentation of the horticulturalist that many of the most promising and beautiful blossoms of his trees do not set in fruit: and that many which do, never ripen to maturity. Precisely similar cases occur to the spiritual husbandman in the garden of the Lord. Where is the faithful minister of Jesus Christ who has not reason often in sadness and disappointment, to adopt the language, and to sympathise in the feelings of surprise, grief, and disappointment, of the apostle Paul, when he said, "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain!" My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you. Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? How often, when through God's grace, as we fondly hoped, we had led the penitent to the cross, directed his eye in faith to the Lamb of God, assisted him in the exercise of a "good hope," and left him in possession of a quiet consciousness of the great change, have we seen him leave his "first love," and instead of advancing into a fuller develope-

ment of Christian character, relinquishing the solicitude he once possessed, and sinking into a state of lukewarm indifference!

Of the multitudes who are confirmed in the Church of England, after the greatest pains have been taken, even by the most spiritual and devoted clergymen, to prepare them for that rite, how many are there who disappoint their hopes! They gave them much sound instruction apart from the design of that ecclesiastical service itself; explained to them the nature of spiritual religion as distinguished from that which is ceremonial, and laid open to them the only ground of a sinner's hope of acceptance with God in the atonement of Christ; read the Scriptures to them, and explained their contents; prayed with them and for them; and as the result of all this, saw these catechumens brought to concern, to conviction, to profession. They welcomed them to the table of the Lord, and rejoiced over them for awhile with great joy as the fruit of their ministry, and the rich and blessed reward of their labours. Alas, the delight was premature, for all this goodness was "as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away."

Similar disappointments attend the ministers of Christ of other denominations. By their pious labours, religious concern is awakened in the minds of some of their hearers. Conviction of sin by the law is produced, and the great question with its accompanying solicitude is awakened, "What shall I do to be saved?" The anxious inquirer is instructed in the way of salvation. He professes to understand and receive "the truth as it is in Jesus." His solicitude subsides into peace. He becomes a professor of religion; is received

into the fellowship of the church; and considers himself, and is considered by others, a Christian. It might be expected that he would now grow in grace; that he would be continually advancing in the divine life; that his attainments would be always increasing; that progression would be the law of his new existence. But is not the contrary to this the case with many of those who make the profession? Do they look like learners in the school of Christ who are making great proficiency in divine knowledge? On the contrary, does it not appear too evident that in many cases, the young disciple, instead of remaining the anxious believer and progressive Christian, has subsided into the careless professor? As if their solicitude was to make a profession, not to maintain it; to be called a Christian, rather than be one; to enjoy church privileges, rather than to feel individual obligations.

It might seem strange that when a false profession is so awfully denounced, and the Lord's table guarded (as if by the flaming sword of a cherub), in that woe pronounced by the apostle upon the unworthy receiver, any one should be so rash and reckless as to expose his soul to the perilous stroke of that fearful weapon. Yet many do so, by partaking of the sacred supper in an unmeet state of mind.

It will, perhaps, be asked, Why do the ministers of religion permit it? I reply, Can they search the heart? Can they discern between the sincere and the self-deceived communicant? Is not a credible profession a sufficient warrant to any minister to admit a person to the communion?

In an age like ours, when evangelical religion bears no stigma, and its professors are called to endure no

persecution, it is natural to suppose that some, yea many, will say, "Lord, Lord, who do not the will of our Father in heaven." Many there are who sufficiently feel the obligation to make a profession of religion, yet have no just sense of what it includes and requires. The persuasion of friends and their own wish to be associated with them, may also lead to this; and thus their consciences are appeased, their sense of religious decorum indulged, and their pious relatives pleased, while at the same time they have no adequate idea of the obligation which the assumption of the Christian name involves.

With many persons there seems to be a radical mistake as to the true nature of the Christian life. It is regarded too much in the light of a mere profession, rather than a practice; a state, rather than a habit; a fixed point, rather than a continuous line; a resting place, rather than a field of labour; the goal, rather than the starting point. A profession has been looked forward to with anxiety, as a something which is to fix and determine the character, to give a religious status, to secure certain immunities. The mind in prospect is perhaps somewhat serious, agitated, and solicitous. The table of the Lord is approached, and perhaps with some solemnity and self-surrender. And it is thought that every thing is now done. The Christian character is formed. The mind is at ease. The inward consciousness is, "I am a professor." With too many, solicitude is from that hour at an end. Instead of trembling anxiety to be all that they profess; to do all that is required of them; to develope all that is comprised in the Christian character; to supply all the defects in knowledge, faith, and holiness, which may be supposed

to exist in those so young in religion; to demonstrate to all around the reality of their piety, by its growth, they settle down at ease upon their profession, and never grow more earnest than they were when they first began to seek the Lord, and not a few of them become less so.

But without supposing such extreme cases of self-satisfaction in the first stages of religion as these, there are others of a somewhat more hopeful character, which still require the cautions, directions, and admonitions of such a work as this. And to put these more clearly before the reader, I observe there are four successive states of mind in reference to religion: absolute indifference; concern, attended by conviction of sin; faith in Christ, bringing relief to the burdened and troubled conscience; and then the work of faith in its continuous influence on the Christian life and character. I am supposing now the case of one who has reached the third stage. His indifference has given place to solicitude; his solicitude has obtained relief by faith. The young disciple has discovered, to his delight, the way of pardon, peace, and eternal life, through the atonement of Christ. There he is, lying down in peace at the foot of the cross. The oppressive burden of his guilt is lost. The tormenting fear which it produced has been cast out by love. He is now ready to say,

"Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,
Which before the cross I spend,
Life, and health, and peace possessing,
From the sinner's dying Friend.
Here I'll sit, with transport viewing
Mercy's streams, in streams of blood:
Precious drops my soul bedewing
Plead and claim my peace with God."

All this is well, good, happy, but it is not enough. Even he, this relieved soul, is but too apt to forget that he has "not yet attained, and is not yet perfect." Even he is but too apt to consider that the great transition from a state of nature to a state of grace, is, if not all that is required, yet all that needs make him anxious. He is so taken up with his justification through faith, and the peace with God which it brings with it, that sanctification is too little thought of by him. He is ready to say of Calvary what Peter did of Tabor, "It is good to be here:" not considering how much yet remains to be done. It is indeed a blessed thing to be pardoned: who can deny it? To look up and see the brow of Deity not clothed with a frown, but radiant with a smile: to see the heavens all serene and cloudless, and to feel the bright beams of mercy diffusing warmth as well as light over the conscience. Oh, the blessedness of the man "whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." But this is not the whole of religion, nor the end of it, nor the highest glory of it. There is to be accomplished the purpose for which this pardon is granted. There is to be carried on and completed all the subsequent work of grace, of which this is only the commencement.

O thou blessed penitent, thou relieved anxious inquirer, thou rejoicing young believer, I would not dash the cup of consolation from thy lips, nor drop into it wormwood and gall. I would not affirm thy joy is premature. On the contrary, I would say, "Rejoice in the Lord, Rejoice in the Lord always." "The joy of the Lord is thy strength." "Go on thy way rejoicing." Yes, but then, Go on. Carry thy joy with thee, even joy and peace in believing. But still I say, Go on.

Onwards! Onwards, is the Christian's watchword. How blessed a night was it to the children of Israel when they celebrated the paschal feast on the eve of their flight from the house of bondage. Yes, but they were to eat it with their staves in their hands, and with other emblems of their flight. How jubilant were their feelings when they found themselves safe on the further shore of the Red Sea. Yes, but there they were not to linger, they must move onwards. All the length of the wilderness stretched between them and the promised land. Privations were to be endured; enemies to be encountered; difficulties to be surmounted; and dangers to be escaped, ere they could set their foot on Canaan. So it is with the Christian; his conversion is but his flight from Egypt; and amidst all the joy of his first faith and first love, he must be reminded of the journey through the wilderness, and be prepared to make it. The journey is in fact to him what it was to those Jews, the great test of character. Of all the six hundred thousand who started so joyfully from Egypt, only two crossed the Jordan. All the rest found graves in the wilderness. Of those who now seem so hopefully to set out for heaven, and make a good profession before many witnesses, how many are satisfied with merely beginning well. In them the Christian character is never developed. They make no progress. Not going forward, they turn backward. Instead of progress, there is retrogression with them. They are like evergreens transplanted in the spring, which for a while look as vigorous and fresh as the other shrubs all around them; but they send out no shoots, though retaining for a while their verdure. The gardener, as he looks

upon the plant, has his fears, and shakes his head; till, as the season advances, the signs of decay are but too apparent, and the leafless skeleton proclaims the work of death. So is it with some who make a profession of religion in youth.

The design of this volume, then, will now be clearly seen, and the persons for whom it is intended be correctly understood. It is a sequel to "The Anxious Inquirer after Salvation Directed and Encouraged;" and takes up the traveller to heaven where that leaves him, and offers to guide him onward in his perilous and eventful course.

ADDRESS TO THE READER.

Before you proceed to read another page, pause, ponder, and examine. Solemnly, as in the presence of God; seriously, as taking up the most momentous subject in the universe; honestly, as wishing to know your real state, ask yourself the question, "Am I stopping in a mere profession? Have not I hastily taken up the Christian name, without duly considering what it is to be a Christian? What strictness and earnestness it implies; what obligations it imposes; what duties it requires; and what progressive improvements it demands? Have I really studied the word of God to obtain a correct idea of the nature of religion? Of its holiness, spirituality, heavenliness? Do I understand it to be a growing meetness for, and a steady advance towards celestial glory? Have I not concluded I am a Christian too hastily? Or, have I not settled down into a state of carelessness, while I ought to be still in a state of anxiety and effort? Or,

supposing I have experienced a change, have I not taken up the idea that religion is a state rather than a progress?"

Reader, put these questions to yourself. Be honest. Wish, long, be intensely anxious, to be right. Tremble to your very soul's centre at the idea of self-deception on so momentous an affair. Before you read another chapter, put down the volume, fall upon your knees, and agonize in prayer, that the perusal may be blessed to your soul. Take the book with you into your closet. Read it in your most serious hours, in your greatest privacy, and in the most solemn manner. I would recommend the directions which I gave with regard to "The Anxious Inquirer." In books for spiritual edification, much depends upon the manner in which they are read. If taken up carelessly, and read in a light mood, or in the company of others, they are little likely to do good. The attention will not be fixed, nor the heart engaged, nor the conscience awakened. You must be somewhere alone with God; where you can have leisure and opportunity to commune with your own heart and with him; where you can pause, reflect, and pray, unobserved by a single fellow-creature; where you can stop, examine, ejaculate, and it may be, weep.

You must read this work, if you would get any good from it, in some such serious manner as this. I have been very serious in writing it. It has lain with great weight upon my spirit, and has been the subject of much earnest prayer to God. I have seen much of the evils it is intended to remove, and felt much of the need of some such work. And as every page has been written in the spirit and exercise of prayer, more or

less, so I feel anxious that every page should be read in the spirit of prayer. Offer, therefore, some such supplication as this :

"Father of mercies, and God of all grace, since thou hast put it into the heart of thy servant to write this little work for my edification, grant me, through Jesus Christ, my only Mediator and Advocate, the teaching and help of thy Holy Spirit, that I may derive spiritual advantage from the perusal of it. Rouse my too dull and flagging soul to consider the importance of the subject. I give thee sincere and hearty thanks that thou hast awakened in me anxiety about salvation, and enabled me to look for the mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, unto eternal life. But as the work of grace is only just begun in me, I earnestly pray that I may be deeply impressed with my indispensable need of progressive improvement. Make me desirous to grow in grace: and may this book, through thy blessing, greatly conduce to that end. Help me to fix my attention upon what I read; to understand what I attend to; to treasure up what I understand, in my memory; and to practice what I remember, so that I may have cause to bless Thee that ever this work came into my hand. Thus, while I am thankful for the instrument, thine shall be the glory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

CHAPTER I.

THE NECESSITY OF PROGRESS.

All spiritual good things tend to improvement. A right principle must, from its very nature, push outward and onward as long as there is in contact with it anything that is wrong, for there is an expansive power in all truth and virtue. It would be strange if this were not the case with religion. It is with goodness as with money, the possession gives the desire to possess more. So that those who are contented with such a measure of piety as they already suppose they possess, give fearful evidence that they have none. And this ought to sound an alarm in the ears of a very large number of persons. "Is it true," they should say, "that a self-satisfied condition is proof of little or no religion; that a quiet, easy, contented mind, without any anxiety to advance, is an evidence that the soul is not in a good and safe state; then ought I not to fear that I am deluding myself, since certainly I know very little about such solicitude as this? Have I not, since I made a profession, seemed to have reached the summit of my hopes, and settled down upon a supposition that I have attained a competency of religion, and that I have enough of it already?" Progress is the law of true religion. This appears,

I. From the commands we find in the Scriptures. I shall select only a few of the most prominent. Ephes. iii, 16–19; iv, 14–16. Read also Phil. i, 9–11; Col. i, 9–11; Heb. vi, 1–3; xiii, 20, 21; 1 Pet. ii, 1; 2 Pet. i, 5; and especially 2 Pet. iii, 18: "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." I request you to lay down this volume, open your Bible, and read these passages, remembering that it is God who speaks to you in every one of them, and commands you to go forward.

II. Consider the Scriptural illustrations of the nature of true religion. I take one first from the Old Testament, and a beautiful one it is; the rise and progress of the sun. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Religion is not like the glimmer of the glow-worm, nor the transient blaze of the meteor, nor the wasting ray of the taper, but the grand luminary of heaven, "coming out of his chamber, and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race." And a very beautiful sight it is, to see a soul rising out of darkness, not stopping on the verge of the horizon, but ascending higher and higher; not merely beginning its course and remaining amidst fogs, clouds, and mists, but shining brighter and brighter with increasing knowledge, faith, and love. But is this shining light the picture of your path? There is no such command given as, "Sun, stand thou still:" therefore it rebukes a stationary profession. It is a rising and advancing, not a declining sun; therefore it rebukes a backsliding state. There may be an occasional cloud, or even in some cases, as of David and Peter, a temporary eclipse. Be thankful for "the day of small things:" despise it not.

But be not satisfied with it. Religion must be a shining and a progressive light.

Among the Scriptural illustrations of the nature of religion, there is none more frequent or better known than life. It is scarcely necessary to quote passages, they are so numerous and so familiar. "He that believeth hath everlasting life." "We know that we have passed from death unto life." Religion is a new, a spiritual, a Divine, a heavenly life, the life of God in the soul of man. Now it is the law of all life to progress. It is so with vegetable and animal vitality, and it must of necessity be so with that which is spiritual. In support of this illustration of progress in religion, I may refer to one of the passages already quoted, "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." Newly converted persons are babes lately born, little infants, feeble in everything that pertains to spiritual life, yet they have life. They are not like still-born children that cannot grow, but are quickened from the death of sin to a life of righteousness. Young Christians are very far from being what they are yet to be, even on earth; as all Christians are very far from being what they are to be in heaven. The representation of archbishop Leighton, in his exquisitely beautiful exposition of this passage, is so striking, that I shall introduce a long quotation from it, which yet no one will deem too long:

"The whole estate and course of the Christians' spiritual life here is called their infancy, not only as opposed to the corruption and wickedness of their previous state, but likewise as signifying the weakness and imperfection of it at the best in this life, compared with the perfection of the life to come; for the weakest beginnings of grace are by no means so far below the highest degree of it possible in this life, as the highest degree falls short of the state of glory; so that,

if one measure of grace is called infancy in respect of another, much more is all grace infancy in respect of glory. And surely, as for duration, the time of our present life is far less, compared to eternity, than the time of our natural infancy is to the rest of our life; so that we may still be called but new or lately born. Our best pace and strongest walk in obedience here, is but as the stepping of children when they begin to go by hold, in comparison of the perfect obedience in glory, the stately, graceful steps with which, on the heights of Zion, we shall walk in the light of the Lord; when 'we shall follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.'

"And this is the wonder of Divine grace, that brings so small beginnings to that height of perfection that we are not able to conceive of; that a little spark of true grace, that is not only indiscernible to others, but often to the Christian himself, should yet be the beginning of that condition wherein they shall shine brighter than the sun in the firmament. The difference is great in our natural life, in some persons especially, that they who in infancy were so feeble, and wrapped up like others in swaddling clothes, yet afterwards come to excel in wisdom and in the knowledge of the sciences, to be commanders of great armies, or to be kings; but the distance is far greater and more admirable between the weakness of these new-born babes, the small beginnings of grace, and their after perfection, that fulness of knowledge that we look for, and that crown of immortality that all are born to who are born of God. But as in the faces and actions of some children, characters and presages of their after greatness have appeared, as a singular beauty in Moses' countenance, as they write of him, and as Cyrus was made king among the shepherd's children, with whom he was brought up, so also certainly in these children of God there be some characters and evidences that they are born for heaven by their new birth. That holiness and meekness, that patience and faith, that shine in the actions and sufferings of the saints, are characters of their Father's image, and show their high original, and foretell their glory to come; such a glory as doth not only surpass the world's thoughts, but the thoughts of the children of God themselves. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.'"

I now, in prosecution of the Scriptural illustrations of religious progress, take up the idea of a spring. "Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever shall

drink of this water shall thirst again; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Permit me to direct your fixed attention to the beauties of this passage. While the pleasures of the world, "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," are but as drops which excite rather than allay the thirst of the natural man after true happiness, or at best leave him unsatisfied; the grace of Christ, in renewing and sanctifying the soul, leads it to the true fountain of bliss, and compels it in the fulness of satisfaction to exclaim, "I have found it! I have found it!" And this source of happiness is not far off, for it is within and not without its possessor. "It shall be in him a well of water." He carries the spring about with him. Hence it is said, "The good man shall be satisfied from himself." And it is also abundant, an unfailing source, a constant supply, a well ever accessible and never dry. But it is not merely the satisfying, but progressive nature of true religion which is here represented. It is a beautiful image, for it is not a stagnant pool, nor a well so deep as that its waters cannot rise; but a spring, whose sparkling and gushing ebullitions shall be ever bubbling up, and forming an ever-living fountain, that flows at all seasons of the year, in heat or cold, and in all the circumstances of the weather, whether foul or fair, wet or dry. Religion lives and shows its beauties amidst all changes of external circumstances. But this inward spring of grace in the soul is represented as rising higher and higher, and never stopping till it reaches eternal life; swelling into a stream which refreshes others in its course to eternity, making all around it fruitful and pleasant; just like a river flowing through a

country, which irrigates the land, and covers it on every hand with fertility and beauty.

I ask, Is this descriptive of our religion? Do we know anything of this indwelling of the Spirit of God? This inward supply from a Divine source of sanctity and bliss? These holy ebullitions of sanctified feeling? This rising up of an inward feeling to a Divine source, an element of life issuing from the parent fountain, and returning to its primitive source; a something godlike, which aspires to God, heavenly, which aspires to heaven, eternal, which rests not till it has reached the eternal? What of all this is in us? Is it mysterious, or plain to us? It is immensely important that we give ourselves time and leisure to inquire into this matter.

The next illustration I borrow is that which we find in our Lord's language: "The earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." This language is rather a description of the growth of grace in the heart, than, (like the grain of mustard seed,) of the advancement of the kingdom of Christ in the world. It is an allusion to one of the beautiful developments and slow processes of nature in vegetable life. How gradually does the principle of vitality evolve, its first germinating being imperceptible to the most observant eye. Yet from that invisible germ, there grows up at length the strong and verdant blade. Then the ear gently and gradually comes forth from its envelopments. This under the genial influence of the heavens and the fertilizing power of the earth, swells into the plump ripe corn, ready for the reaper's sickle. Instructive and beautiful emblem of that more precious seed of the word of God which is sown in the heart of man by God's regenerating work!

It is at first small, feeble, tender, scarcely perceptible, like the first shoots of the grain in the earth. It may be only the early impressions upon a child's mind, listening to his mother's gentle admonition and familiar instruction. Or it may be a conviction lodged in the soul under some melting or alarming sermon. Or it may be a serious reflection occasioned by some painful visitation of Providence. God has various methods of entering by his grace into the soul of the unconverted sinner. The seed may lie long like the grain in the earth, before any sign of vegetable life is perceptible; yet all this while the vital process may be going on. At length it rises above the ground and its growth is visible, and continues till the result already described is apparent. But like corn in its earlier stages, it needs the greatest watchfulness and care, for it is peculiarly susceptible of injury and destruction.

The last illustration I take up is that of a race. Hence the impressive language of the apostle, "Know ye not that they which run in a race, run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible." No subject could be more familiar than this to the minds of the Corinthians, who were often spectators of the national games, celebrated upon the isthmus on which their city was situated, and hence denominated the Isthmian. Among these games the foot-race sustained a distinguished place. To this, express allusion is made by the apostle in writing to the Hebrews, among whom these national festivities had been introduced by Herod the Great. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with

so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." Every expression in these two passages is allusive and instructive. The enrolled competitor underwent for several months, like the men who engage in those disgraceful feats, our prize fights, a rigid system of physical training. Hence the expression, "He that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things." The candidates were obliged to keep in the course marked out, and to observe all the rules prescribed: wherefore it is said, "If a man strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned except he strive lawfully." The racers laid aside their garments and ran nearly naked. Hence the exhortation, "Let us lay aside every weight (every unnecessary care, every lust both of the flesh and of the mind), and the sin which doth so easily beset us." The race was carried on amidst an immense crowd of spectators: hence the language, "We also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." The prize was merely honorary, consisting only of a chaplet of leaves, which withered ere it was worn: hence it is said, "They do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible." How finely does this illustrate that sublime passage in the epistle to the Philippians, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the

high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Every term here employed refers to the ancient foot-race, and the whole passage beautifully represents the ardour which fired the competitors when engaged in the contest.

Such, and so impressive, is the description given us by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, of the nature of religion; of the Christian life; and it is sufficient to make all somewhat anxious about their own state, and to reveal the utter worthlessness and hollowness of the pretensions of many to the possession of true piety. Does not this illustrative figure set forth more forcibly and vividly than any mere language could do, that the Christian life is a state of self-denial, intense desire, deep solicitude; of strenuous, unremitted, unwearied action; and of constant progress? How was the soul of the racer filled and fired with the hope of success! How patiently he bore the necessary privations! How he strained every muscle and quickened his speed to the uttermost in the fear of defeat and the prospect of victory! Reader, whosoever you are whose eye shall wander over these pages, pause, I beseech you, and ponder this subject. This is the inspired description of religion, and must, therefore, be the correct one. Does your religion answer to this? Know you aught of such solicitude for the salvation of your soul, such labour to attain it, as are implied in this representation? Is your religion really a race? Does your eye often gaze upon the crown of life, and your bosom swell with the mighty aspiration after glory, honour, and immortality? Oh, do not deceive yourself. Look at this, there is something more than profession here. Something more than the easy and careless bearing of the Christian name which many exhibit.

But it is progress that the subject leads us now especially to contemplate. The racer was not only in action, but in progress. It was with him not merely bounding off with a vigorous start; nor exerting himself to the uttermost of his strength for a part of the course; but a continual going onwards. Hence the beautiful language of the apostle: "Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before." One who was running in the ancient race would not stop to look back to see how much ground he had run over, or which of his companions had fallen or lingered on the way. He would keep his eye fixed on the goal and the prize, and strain every nerve to reach them. If his attention were diverted for a single moment it might hinder his speed and might be the means of his losing the crown. Onwards, onwards, he was borne by the mighty impulse which stimulated him in his course. So was it with the apostle.

III. If anything more be necessary to convince you of the necessity of progress, consider the rebukes met with in Scripture. How often did our Lord reprove his disciples for the infantine feebleness of their faith; and with what just severity did the apostle reproach the believing Hebrews for their want of progress. "When," said he, "for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." Could anything be more reproachful of their culpable negligence, their shameful indolence, their voluntary backwardness in seeking after divine knowledge? They were babes when they ought to

have been, and might have been, of full and matured strength. They were content with the very rudiments of Christianity, the alphabet of religion. It satisfied them just to have light enough to grope after salvation, and to walk on in dim twilight. Alas, alas! how many are like them. How many are content with the veriest elements of knowledge and experience! Talk with them, observe them years after they have made a profession of religion, and you will find them possessed of only the crudest notions and the most unsettled feelings. They are no further on in the divine life than they were: yea, they have gone back.

Read also the pungent rebukes of our Lord to the churches in the Apocalypse. He thus addresses the church at Ephesus: "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted." How exalted a character! How rich a piety! How fine an eulogium! Surely there is nothing here to condemn. Yes, there is. Mark what follows: "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." See that. Dwell upon it. No attainments, no eminence, can compensate for a decline of "first love." Christ will allow no plea of extenuation to be put in; much less any defence to be set up. Hence what follows, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

ADDRESS TO THE READER.

You have now learned from the word of God, the necessity of progress. What think you of it? Has it ever occurred to you thus before? Does it strike you now? Can you deny or doubt this necessity? Can you be indifferent to it, or trifle with it? Perhaps you have overlooked it. You have never entered into the subject; but have had all your attention directed, and all your solicitude awakened, to make a good beginning, a public profession, a favourable start. But is this all that is necessary? Can you really satisfy yourself that your religion is real if it be unattended with a conviction that it should be progressive? Do, do study afresh, I beseech you, the representations given in this chapter. Ask yourself the one question, "Am I laying aside every weight and the sin that does so easily beset me, and so running the race that is set before me, as to obtain the prize of eternal glory?" Are you? Is there that intense desire after the crown, that vigorous effort to obtain it, that eager hope to receive it, which will impel you onward with the speed of the ancient racer? Oh, are you convinced that it is not a faint endeavour, but a mighty conflict that will gain eternal life? Are you saying to yourself, "I must forget the things that are behind and press towards the mark for the prize of my high calling? I cannot be satisfied to be always as I am. I pant to be holier." Again, I say, pause and pray. Read no more till you have entered your closet, and have put up the prayer of faith for a deeper conviction of the necessity of progress.

CHAPTER II.

NATURE OF PROGRESS.

What is it to make progress in religion? Progress is not only action, but moving onward. A door turning upon its hinges is in a state of motion, but it never advances. A chariot moving upon wheels is not only in action, but goes onward. The conduct of some persons in religion resembles the former, there is action but no advancement: they move, but it is on hinges, not on wheels. They go through, perhaps, even with regularity, the exercises of devotion, both public and private. They may be mechanically exact and punctual; still they do not go forward.

There are two ways of setting forth the nature of progress. First. By representing the young convert after his profession has been made, as retaining with consistency his early views, feelings, and conduct and carrying them with him into future life and all its various conditions, scenes, duties, and relations. Life itself is progressive and ever-changing. Imagine the case of a youth who receives his first religious impressions, and assumes the religious character, while at home with his parents. To prepare for future life he leaves his father's house and becomes either an apprentice or a shopman. In too many cases, a change of scene produces a change

of character, and his religion under the influence of the unfavourable circumstances in which he is now placed, or by the power of temptation, declines, if it be not altogether abandoned. But in the case I am supposing, the youth holds fast his integrity, and amidst irreligious and scoffing companions maintains his steadfastness and consistency. He bears opposition and insult with firmness, fortitude, and meekness. Here is progress. He may have no great increase of knowledge or holiness, but what he had of both has been exposed to hard trials and has surmounted them, and this itself is growth, and great growth too. So of a daughter who remains at home: her profession may have been assumed when very young, before her heart was susceptible of the corrupting influence of the world. The time arrives when the child passes into the girl, and the girl into the young woman. At this transition, when she feels the desire of companionship, when her society is courted, and she is invited to parties and amusements, we often see sad instances of declension. Seriousness is gone, and little else than a mere profession is left. But in the case of real progress, the purpose to serve the Lord is unmoved, the resolve to come out from the world and be separate is unshaken. There is the same earnestness, seriousness, and decision as ever. Company, flattery, publicity, produce no alteration of conduct or character. She is solicitous not how nearly she can come to the world and yet not be of it; but how far she may recede from it, without affecting singularity, unnecessary precision, or a violation of the courtesies of life. She is the same simple-minded Christian, the same decided follower of the Lamb, amidst the development of womanhood as she was in her teens. This is

progress, great progress. To retain her first love amidst the change of circumstances is advance, because it has been put to a new test, and has honourably borne the ordeal.

A similar remark may be made in reference to the influence of our religion on the different relations of life. When young people, who have parents living, are converted to God, it is of course their duty to let their religion influence them as children. Religion is not only to make us better towards God, but better towards man; and he who is really made better towards God will infallibly be made better towards man; and if we are not improved in our conduct towards our fellow-creatures, it is certain we are not improved in our conduct towards our Creator. There is progress when the great change is proved by persons being made better husbands or wives; better parents or children; better masters or servants. It is a beautiful growth of godliness, when social excellence and all its blessed fruits are seen springing out of the stem of piety. Oh, to see the prodigal son brought back by religion to his father's arms and home; or the unkind and unfaithful husband brought back by piety to the woman whom he had oppressed and insulted; or the faithless servant, like Onesimus, reclaimed by his conversion from dishonesty and injustice! Show me the professing Christian whose social character is as unlovely after profession as it was before, he has made no progress in religion, though he may have increased in knowledge and some other things connected with it.

Then, when the youth arrives at manhood, and carries his religion with him into business, and amidst all its cares, temptations, and perplexities, holds fast his

personal godliness, and unites the Christian tradesman with the Christian professor, letting his light shine before men so that they, seeing his good works, glorify God, there is progress. When a young disciple in high life is brought out, and emerges into fashionable society, and retains her spirituality and consistency, amidst surrounding gaiety, there is progress.

Have not many women, who while young, unmarried, and unencumbered with domestic cares, were earnest in piety, become careless, lukewarm, and indifferent when surrounded with the scenes and occupied with the solicitudes of a wife, a mother, and a mistress? This, however, is not always the case, as the biography of pious women can amply testify. It is a beautiful sight to behold a young wife and mother retaining her attention to religion in all its earnestness and spirituality, and thus qualifying herself for her new situation by all the power of that godliness which she gained in single life. There is eminent progress.

Then what vicissitudes affect us in this world! Some are raised to prosperity from low circumstances, and lose their religion by little and little in the ascent, till it is all gone by the time they reach the summit. Rarely has it happened that men have not been the worse for prosperity; more rarely still that they have been the better for it. What an advance in godliness has he made, who retains his decision, his earnestness, his spirituality, and his humility, amidst the rising tide of wealth, and who is the same man in spirit after his success as he was before it.

And so with adversity, to bear it with meek submission to the will of God; especially when it comes to one who has moved in the circles of wealth and fashion;

to endure chastisement with all long-suffering and joyfulness; to appear cheerful amidst surrounding gloom; hopeful amidst desponding circumstances; happy in God when there is nothing else to give happiness: he who does this has indeed made great advances in the divine life.

But perhaps what I have hitherto considered, is rather the progress of the Christian with religion, than his progress in it, the retention and manifestation of piety in various situations, rather than the increase of piety itself, and does not so completely bring out the idea of progress as another method of representation, although it is a necessary and most important part of the subject. I now, therefore, take up the other view.

There ought to be growth in everything that constitutes personal godliness. And as all true religion is based on knowledge, there should be an increase of that. Defects here, as I have already shown, were the occasion of the apostle's rebuke to the Hebrews. The increase of knowledge was much in the apostle's prayers for the churches. Ephes. i, 17–23; iii, 18, 19; Philip, i, 9; Col. i, 9. In all these passages, to which I hope you will turn, you will see how earnest St. Paul was that his converts should advance in knowledge. Apart from, or without, this, there can be but slow advances in anything else. This is clear from the apostle's exhortation, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." There, you see, growth in grace and growth in knowledge are inseparably connected. Light is essentially necessary to natural vegetation; so it is to that which is spiritual. Young converts are sometimes so taken up with religious feeling and doing, as to forget the importance of knowledge to

control them in their feelings and acts. By growth in knowledge, then, I mean an increasing understanding of the contents of the word of God, and its true meaning: a real advance in acquaintance with Biblical truth.

There are three or four matters which may be considered the very substance of the Bible, and with which every Christian should make himself as familiar as his time and circumstances will allow. The Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, as God-man Mediator; or "God in Christ reconciling the world to himself," is the grand peculiarity of the Bible. It was dimly shadowed forth under the Old Testament, and is clearly revealed in the New. Christ is the Alpha and Omega of Revelation. You cannot understand the Bible if you are ignorant of this. The true and proper Divinity of Christ's person is the corner-stone of Christian doctrine. Compare Psalm cii, 25–27, with Heb. i, 10; Psalm xlv, 6, with Heb. i, 8; Isaiah vi, with John xii, 37–41; Isaiah xlv, 23, 24, with Rom. xiv, 9–11. Read, also, Matt. xviii, 20; John i, 1, 10–14; viii, 56–58; x, 30; xiv, 8–10; xvii, 5; xx, 28; Rom. ix, 5; Philip. ii, 5–11; Col. i, 16; ii, 9; 1 Tim. iii, 16; Heb. i; 1 John v, 20; Rev. i. These are only a portion of the Scriptures that testify the true and proper Divinity of our Lord. Do give yourselves time and leisure to turn to them, to study them, to treasure them up in your mind. But it is Christ as Mediator, also, you are to consider, uniting in a way we cannot comprehend, the Divine and human nature in his one glorious person. As Mediator he died in the sinner's stead as his substitute, and by his death upon the cross made an atonement for the sinner's transgression. How clearly, how gloriously, how unanswerably does the doctrine of the atonement shine

forth in that wonderful passage, Rom. iii, 24–26. There, propitiation, which is the same in meaning as atonement, is declared to be the very end of Christ's incarnation and death. Three times, in the compass of two verses, is it declared, that the demonstration of God's justice is the end of Christ's sufferings unto death. The whole gospel scheme is a manifestation of mercy in a way of righteousness. In redemption God shows love to us in a way that eclipses neither the glory of his character, his laws, nor his government. Understand well the design of Christ's death, of the mysterious method of his vicarious sacrifice, that it was to render the salvation of the sinner consistent with the honour of God, which could be done only by an atonement. At the same time, understand well the nature of atonement. That Jesus Christ having died in the place and stead of guilty man, it is for the sake and out of regard to his death as the meritorious consideration that God pardons the sinner, and that by this scheme of Divine wisdom and mercy, the same purpose in regard to justice and to the maintenance of the principles of moral government is accomplished, as the punishment of the sinner himself would have effected. It is in this view that we see the connexion between the Divinity of Christ and the doctrine of atonement. The sacrifice of one who was a mere man, or a creature however highly exalted, could not be as clear a display of God's public justice as the punishment of the whole multitude of pardoned sinners would have been. There was required a sacrifice of a very peculiar nature. And we have it in Christ. He was truly and properly man, that he might suffer and die, which God could not do; he was God, and thus the sufferings of the manhood

acquired from his Divinity a character of infinite merit and worth. For a proof of this doctrine I refer you to Isaiah liii., and to the whole Levitical law, as compared with the Epistle to the Hebrews, especially to Leviticus xvi, compared with Heb. ix, x. Read also Matt. xx, 28; Rom. v, 9 to end; 1 Cor. xv, 3; 2 Cor. v, 21; 1 Pet. i, 18–20; ii, 24; 1 John iv, 10; Rev. i, 5.

Another subject which it is immensely important for a young Christian to understand is God's method of bestowing the blessings of salvation upon the sinner; that is, the doctrine of justification by faith. Who are the persons that will receive salvation, and what is the way in which they receive it? This has been plainly set forth in my treatise, "The Anxious Inquirer after Salvation Directed and Encouraged." By the doctrine of justification by faith, I mean, that when a sinner is convinced of his transgression, is truly penitent, and believes the testimony of the gospel, that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," he is pardoned, received to the Divine favour, and entitled to eternal life, not on account of his own sentiments, feelings, actions, or anything of his own, but entirely for the sake of the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, which are in such sense imputed to him that he receives the full benefit of them as if they were his own. Justification by faith is the answer to that momentous question, "How shall man be just with God?" And the reply is, Not by works of his own, but by faith in the work of another, that is, Christ. He must have a righteousness in which to stand before a righteous and a holy, as well as a merciful God. He has no such righteousness of

his own. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness unto him." "He of God is made unto him righteousness." This is justification, the same in substance as pardon; with this difference, that the word pardon simply expresses only the blessing we receive, while the word justification includes the idea of the way in which it comes to us, that is, by righteousness. There is also this other difference: justification signifies our entrance upon the state of pardon or adoption, and can take place but once: pardon may be often repeated towards one who is in this condition of acceptance.

It is of great consequence to a right understanding of divine truth, and to a proper growth in knowledge and in grace, to observe and ever maintain the distinction between justification and sanctification. The fall brought in two evils upon man, guilt upon his conscience, whereby he lost God's favour, and became obnoxious to his wrath; and depravity into his nature, whereby he lost God's image, and became earthly, sensual, and devilish. To be restored to bliss, in other words, to be saved, he needs to have his guilt pardoned and his nature renewed. This is provided for in the gospel scheme of redemption. By the blood and righteousness of Christ, our sins are pardoned; and by the work of the Holy Spirit our hearts are renewed, our nature changed, and our lives sanctified. The work of the Spirit begins in regeneration, and is carried on in progressive sanctification. The difference, therefore, between justification and sanctification is very great and obvious, and must ever be maintained in our views. Justification is the work of Christ for us; sanctification the work of the Spirit in us: justification is perfect at once; sanctification is progressive: justification is be-

fore sanctification, and sanctification is the fruit of justification; consequently the evidence of our justification is in our sanctification. All the first joy and peace of the sinner must come to him by justification; but his peace, joy, and bliss as a believer must flow in great measure from his sanctification: justification is in order to sanctification, rather than sanctification in order to justification. These remarks may seem to some to be mere theological technicalities. But they are not so. They enter into the very vitalities of personal godliness. For the study of the doctrine of justification; and it ought to be a subject of study, deep study and progressive intelligence; the following portions of Scripture should be devoutly perused: Isaiah xliii; Jer. xxxiii, 15–16; Rom. iii, iv, v, x; 1 Cor. i, 30–31; 2 Cor. v, 21; Gal. ii, iii, iv; Philip. iii.

These are the chief matters to be investigated in perusing the word of God. Not that the attention is to be exclusively confined to them. Nothing in the Bible is unworthy the attention of a Christian; for "all Scripture," and this expression refers to the Old Testament, "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."

It is not, however, in the doctrinal or historical parts of the word of God only that the young Christian is to increase his knowledge. In religion there is nothing purely scientific: all, all is practical. It is declared in the passage just quoted, to be the design of the Bible "that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." Truth is but a means to an end, and that end is holiness. Every one of us

ought to study our Bibles with that prayer upon our lips, "Sanctify me through thy truth; thy word is truth." We should grow in our knowledge of the character of God, that we may resemble it; of the perfection of the law, that we may be conformed to it; of the example of Jesus, that we may be more like it. We should be convinced that we are not yet as perfect in what we do know as we should be, as well as that there is much yet that we do not know. A desire to know, in order merely to know, is curiosity; but a desire to know the will of God, in order to do it, is sanctity.

There ought, then, to be progress in knowledge. No Christian should be satisfied with the mere rudiments of it. And yet the great bulk seek for nothing more. It is really humiliating and painful to preachers to find how little, in the way of imparting knowledge, is effected by all their sermons. No students seem satisfied with so little increase of ideas as those who profess to be of the school of Christ. Usefulness, happiness, and true religious dignity are thus hindered. And not only so, but religion itself is stunted and starved, and its lustre diminished. And even those who do read and think, peruse only, or chiefly, the works of men. Never was there an age when Bibles were more widely circulated, and never an age when they were less read by many who possess them. Magazines, periodicals, and books of all kinds have come in upon us like a flood, and in many cases have almost swept away the Bible. After all, it is Bible truth from its own source that is the concentrated nutriment of the divine life; and it will be found that those are usually the strongest, healthiest, and most rapidly growing of the children

of God, who live most upon the sincere, that is, the pure and "unadulterated" milk of the word of God. The works of men are very useful in their place when they lead us to the word of God; but too many persons allow themselves to be kept away by them from the fountains of pure truth. The church of God, for its growth, generally needs to be led back more to the sacred Scriptures.

Decision of character must be strengthened. At first many a true Christian is a little hesitating and halting. His opinions are fluctuating. His purposes are irresolute. His steps are faltering. He is timid; afraid of the laughter of some, and the frowns of others. He is fearful of being made the subject of remark, and especially of critical and cynical remark. He cannot encounter reproach; and is not yet bold enough to say, "Laugh on; none of these things move me; my mind is made up." Sometimes he is too regardful of his worldly interests. He is a little too flexible and compliant. He makes concessions which principle forbids. Companionship has too much power over him. He has not yet acquired grace to assert manfully his independence. Hence he is in great danger. This state of mind is perilous in the extreme. If he do not grow out of it, it will grow upon him. He is likely to draw back, and to give up all. See, then, the importance of his immediately seeking to grow in firmness and resoluteness. This was the first thing which the apostle enjoined next to belief: "Add to your faith virtue," or as the word signifies, "courage:" courage to assert and maintain your principles before all observation, and against all opposition. Put on at once the courage of a hero, and the constancy of a

martyr. Prove that piety, though contrary to the ambition of military heroism, is itself the most heroic spirit in the world. Acquire more and more of the courage which dares to be singular in goodness. Be more insensible to the world's favour, frown, or smile.

Faith is susceptible of growth. It was the prayer of the apostles, "Lord, increase our faith." And we read continually in the Bible of "strong" and "weak faith." Faith may be considered either general, as believing the whole word of God, which is the faith spoken of in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews; or particular, as having respect to the person and work of Christ. As regards the former, there is ample room in most minds for growth. Difficulties, after the first impressions and convictions are over, soon arise and present themselves to the young and inexperienced Christian, and often multiply in his path. He is perplexed, and knows not how to get rid of them. He is sometimes staggered. His mind is uncomfortable. Now, it is obviously his duty, and equally his privilege, to put aside these obstacles. Of course he should pray for Divine grace, and, in the language already quoted, should say, "Lord, increase my faith." But this is not all he should do. He should read as well as pray. His mind should grow in acquaintance with the evidence of Divine revelation. He should ponder the miracles of Christ and his apostles; the accomplishment of prophecy in the person and work of the Saviour; the history of the Jews; the success of the gospel in its first ages by the teaching of fishermen, not only without, but against, the powers of the earth; the sublime doctrines and pure morality of the Bible; the lofty views it gives of God, and its correct representations of human nature;

the power it has in not only changing the aspects of society, but in the renovation of the individual man; the miserable condition of humanity beyond the range and influence of Christianity, showing the need men have of a revelation; with the pretensions of false religions, proving the conviction they evince that a revelation would be given. Now all these should become the subject of deep thought and reflection, and then the opposing difficulties will appear light and little. Such studies are too much neglected by many persons, who are contented to take their religion upon trust, or to go on their way perplexed by the flippant cavils of infidelity which are so common in this age of scepticism and unbelief. True it is, that their own conversion ever will be the strongest evidence of the truth of revelation to the great mass of the people; yet an acquaintance with these, its historic proofs, will be of great service, and yield great pleasure in their religious course.

But there must be a deep solicitude to grow in that special faith which has direct reference to the Saviour and his work. Christ is the chief object proposed to the sinner in the New Testament. The eye that sweeps round the whole circle of divine truth must rest in him as the centre. Faith is confidence, and confidence may be weak, partial, and wavering; or it may be undivided, firm, and settled. The young Christian, though convinced that Christ is the only ground of hope and the only source of salvation; though upon the whole resting upon him, and expecting all things from him, is not yet brought, perhaps, to that full and entire turning away from everything else, and that complete resting on the Lord Jesus which an intelligent and strong faith requires. He looks much to his frames of mind and feelings, and

his various experiences; and as a consequence, his peace rises and falls according to this thermometer. A little more freedom in prayer, or enjoyment under a sermon, or elasticity of feeling in his ordinary course, raises him to the mount; while a little less sinks him to the valley. His opinion of his state is as variable as his emotions, and to a considerable extent is decided by them. Thus, his course is an alternation of gloom and sadness. What does all this indicate, but that the eye is not upon Christ, but upon self? What does it prove, but that faith in Jesus is weak and wavering? That the mind does not yet see so clearly His finished work as the ground of hope and source of joy as it should do? The soul is not yet weaned from self-righteousness, but is, almost unconsciously to itself, going about "to establish its own righteousness," if not of works, yet of feelings. Now faith will as certainly take us off from dependence upon the latter as upon the former. Nor is this all, for the weak believer is looking about to many other things for strength and holiness, instead of Jesus. He does not yet see so clearly as he should do, that "Christ of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Friends, ordinances, self-imposed rules of conduct, are all appealed to with this petition, "Help me." And in proper measure and season, it is quite right to use those helps; but not to the neglect of faith in Jesus. A Christian who has grown in faith has risen above this, and is enabled to say, and to rejoice as he says it, "I now see that all fulness of blessing is in Christ, and that it is from that fulness I am to receive, and grace for grace. I am now weaned from self, and am no longer looking to it for anything but conviction and condemnation, but am

looking wholly and always to Jesus. My justification, sanctification, consolation, stability, and perseverance, are all from him, just as all the sap which supports the life and promotes the fruitfulness of a branch is derived from its vital union with the tree. Being safely built upon him as my foundation, I mingle nothing with his work, and find continual matter of rejoicing. Whatever view I take of his person and work, whether I think of his Divinity or perfect humanity; his atonement, intercession, or example, comfort presents itself. Grace has made me willing to live out of myself, upon the fulness of Jesus. In him I have what I want, all I want."

Holiness is an essential part, yea, the very essence, of personal godliness. This was the image of God in the soul of man at his creation, which man lost by the fall, and which it is the design of the work of redemption to restore. Gen. i, 26, 27, compared with Ephes. iv, 22–24. Are we predestinated, it is that we may be holy. Ephes. i, 4. Are we called, it is with a "holy calling." 1 Thess. iv, 7; 2 Tim. i, 9. Are we justified freely by God's grace, it is that we may be holy. Titus iii, 7, 8. Are we afflicted, it is that we may be partakers of God's holiness. Heb. xii, 10. The whole work of Christ has its end in holiness. He "loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Ephes. v, 26, 27; Titus ii, 11–14. It is a very low and unworthy idea of the design of Christ's death, to conceive of it as only intended to save men from hell; to consider it as

only designed to save them from becoming prisoners and felons, and from undergoing the ignominy of a public execution. His gracious purpose, in addition to this, was to make them sons of God, and bright and glorious resemblances of their Divine Parent. Holiness was the bliss of Paradise before Adam fell: holiness will constitute the bliss of heaven. All the inhabitants of that state are holy; all its occupations are holy; all its influence is holy. Hence the indispensable necessity of holiness in the Christian character, and of the growth of holiness in the Christian life. It is obvious that this is susceptible of all degrees, and there is great need to say to the recent convert, "Follow after holiness," for he is so likely to be taken up with the joy of pardon and the peace of faith as somewhat to forget the necessity of sanctification. At first his views of sin are both defective and superficial. Many things in practice are wrong which he does not at first think to be so; and of the depravity of his heart he has very faint notions indeed; while also he sees but little of the exceeding sinfulness of sin in general. He must, therefore, seek to increase in love of God, hatred of all sin, and entire consecration of his heart and life to the service of God. Be not satisfied then without a growth in holiness, of which you shall possess the most entire consciousness yourself, and which shall be equally evident to others. Holiness is happiness, and the more you have of the former the more undoubtedly you will enjoy of the latter. Enter more and more fully into the bliss of finding the life of God in the soul continually increasing in vigour and in operation. It is a sign of growth in holiness when the mind is not only more enlightened in the nature, evil, and existence of sin in general; but

when we become more aware of little sins which did not formerly strike us; when the eye of the mind is more microscopic, and can detect sins which we formerly did not see, and especially when we are more affected by them. When also we are more solicitous to find out such unknown sins; when we search for them ourselves, taking the candle of the Lord, and going down into the depths of our own heart to bring to light what we did not before discover, and when, not being satisfied with our own searching, we carry the matter to God, and in the language of David pray thus, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me." When we are afraid of little sins, sins of ignorance, of inadvertence, and of carelessness; when the soul is so anxious to be holy as that it would not have even secret faults kept within it; when the conscience, like the apple of the eye, becomes so tender that it cannot bear the slightest touch, this, this is growth in holiness. Blessed is that soul which is thus assimilating more and more closely to the image of God.

Spirituality of mind and heavenliness of affection are essential elements of true piety: "to be spiritually-minded is life and peace." And it is also the state and character of the Christian to live with his thoughts, affections, and aspirations centering in God and heaven. How strong an expression is that of the apostle, and how little is it known by the generality of professors; "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life

is hid with Christ in God." Pause, reader, and ponder upon this impressive language. This is the mind of a real Christian. This is the experience of a child of God. It is to this that renewing grace is designed to bring us. What know you of this spiritual renovation, this strange mixture of death and life in the same soul; this holy paradox? Ah, what! Know and understand that vital piety is something more than an abstinence from crimes, vices, and sins; yes, and something more than the practice of the conventional virtues, not only of the world, but of the church. It is a spiritual, heavenly mind, an unearthly disposition. The thoughts and affections, by a holy spontaneity, rise up and flow to God, like the ebullition of a spring, without external force or instrumentality. Divine things possess an attraction which of itself draws the soul towards them. Sermons, or books, or places, or occasions, are not needed to engage the mind and heart that way. There is an inward taste which, like any other taste, is itself a predisposition for them. The soul, of its own accord, self-moved, self-drawn, goes to Christ, to God, to heaven. This is growing in grace, and increasing with all the increase of God; this is walking more and more by faith, when spiritual, divine, invisible objects acquire a greater power over the soul; when there needs but the slightest touch to set the mind in motion, and the Christian feels increasingly that his element is devotion, and his native air the atmosphere of piety.

The Christian temper is one great part of true religion; and by this, as distinguished from what has gone before, I mean the passive virtues and amiable affections of the heart; or what is called "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." Or to refer to another term

so often employed by the apostle, I mean the charity so beautifully described in the thirteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians. It is of immense importance that every one beginning the divine life should study both that chapter and our Lord's sermon upon the Mount. Those portions of holy writ fully and intentionally describe and set forth the Christian temper. Young professors, and indeed old ones too, sadly forget that love is the very essence of the Christian spirit: and the very soul of practical religion; love that represses the strong passions of the heart and the boisterous conduct of the life; love that makes us cautious against giving offence, and backward to receive it; love that renders us forbearing and forgiving; love that produces a calm, equable mind, and which speaks in soft, kind, and gentle speech; love that dreads the infliction of pain, and covets the communication of happiness. How peaceful and amiable; how kind and affable; how tender and sympathetic; how courteous and obliging, would this love make us to all around! What lovely specimens of Christianized humanity, and what attractive recommendations of it, would this make us! This, this is the spirit in which to make progress. Too many have no idea of subjecting their temper to the influence of religion. And yet what is changed if the temper be not; and of what use is any other change? If a man is as passionate, malicious, resentful, sullen, moody, or morose, after his conversion as before it, what is he converted from or to? "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," said the apostle: and in another place, "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Now, the mind of Jesus was loving, kind, meek, gentle, and

forgiving; and unless we have these virtues we have not, and cannot have, the mind of Jesus. We must not take up the idea that temper is so much a matter of constitution, a thing so unconquerable, that we may as well think to alter the shape and complexion of our body, as to attempt to change the natural temper of the mind. It can be improved, it has been in millions of instances, it must be. We must all of us grow more and more in the "whatsoever things are lovely."

There is perhaps no sign of growth more decisive, nor is there anything more desirable in itself, than the union of increasing holiness with a wider view of Christian liberty. These two are sometimes dissociated, and we see, on the one hand, liberty degenerating into licentiousness, and, on the other, holy obedience sinking into bondage. The freedom of the one is privilege in opposition to duty; the thraldom of the other is duty to the neglect of privilege. Many an old, but corrupt, professor has abjured the obligations of the moral law, that he might enjoy, as he supposed, "the liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free;" while many a young one has placed himself in spirit under the yoke of the ceremonial code, and brought himself into a slavery repugnant to the free and generous spirit of the gospel. It is as undoubted a fact that "where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty," as that there is holiness. Both passages in the same context are equally true, where it is said, "There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus;" but then "they walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made them free from the law of sin and of death." This is in order, "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled

in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." How beautifully liberty and holiness are balanced in this passage! And how important is the exhortation of the apostle, "Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh." By liberty, then, I understand, not only a freedom from the yoke, but also from the spirit, of the ceremonial law: the spirit of a child in opposition to that of a slave. In other words, serving God in a spirit of love, which casts out tormenting fear. Young Christians, who are not yet so enlightened and so settled in what are called the doctrines of grace, or of free justification through the righteousness of Christ, as they should be, are a long time troubled with a legal spirit. There is a kind of superstitious punctiliousness in little things; things are prescribed by human authority, invented by human ingenuity, or borrowed from human examples, but not enjoined by the word of God. In the early stages of religious experience, there is often an unenlightened and sickly tenderness of conscience, an excessive and shrinking sensibility, which not only subject their possessor to a deprivation of lawful comforts and a large amount of very unnecessary pain, but which also incapacitate him for the vigorous and efficient discharge of his duty. A man always hesitating, fearing, and trembling, lest he has failed to execute in some minute particular the will of God, even when his intentions were the most pure and his efforts the most diligent and faithful, is but ill prepared either to enjoy his privileges as a child of God, or to encounter the various events and changes of the Christian life. He will experience little of that "joy of the Lord," which is our "strength," and go on his way in heavi-

ness. He is the last to whom we should look for an illustration of that Scripture: "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them." We should cultivate a filial spirit that will enable us, amidst our numberless imperfections and failings, (all of which must be mourned and resisted,) cheerfully to enjoy our Christian privileges, and to persevere in the way of duty, not doubting that we shall be sustained with power from on high to lead a holy life, and that through the grace of God, and the merits of Christ, all our deficiencies and errors will be mercifully forgiven, and we shall find acceptance at the last. I know very well that the tendency of many is, in these days, to extend too widely, rather than to contract too narrowly, the circle of Christian liberty; but in that case, there is a proportionate diminution of holiness. The conduct is as little scrupulous in neglecting the weightier matters of the law, as it is in overlooking the lesser matters of human imposition. There cannot be a darker sign for any person than to be for ever complaining of the strictness of religion, and endeavouring to relax the bonds of spiritual obligation under the notion of enjoying Christian liberty. It is a striking mark of progress in the divine life when we are brought to adopt, in intelligence and good faith, the apostle's rule of conduct for himself: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Instead of claiming, as many do, indulgence for acts unlawful in themselves because they are supposed to be beneficial in their effects, Paul was not content even with the positive lawfulness of actions, unless to that was superadded a manifest tendency to

the production of good, setting in no case these two qualities of morality and expediency in opposition to each other, much less making the inferior to overbalance that which is of greater force and value; but refusing to take a step when they did not coincide. He did not resolve, "I will perform those things that are expedient though they be not lawful; but I will not venture even upon lawful actions if they be not expedient." Here is progress, indeed, when with enlarged views of Christian liberty, there is at the same time an increasing disposition to make that liberty subservient to our own holiness, and also the well-being of others.

Christian activity is essential to Christian consistency. The injunctions to this are so numerous as to be interwoven with the whole texture of Scripture. This is set forth by two very striking metaphors, where Christ told his disciples they were to be "the light of the world," and "the salt of the earth;" than which nothing can be more instructive or impressive. They are to illuminate the moral darkness, and purify the corruption by which they are surrounded. It is one end of their conversion, for no man is converted only for himself. Hence said Christ to Peter, "And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Every truly regenerated person is, and should consider himself, another chosen, appointed, and prepared instrument for the world's conversion. God works by means and instruments, and they are not exclusively the ministers of religion. There are many ways in which every real Christian can do good to others, without invading the ministerial office, or stepping out of his place. This is required by the law, which commands us to love God; for can we love him and not desire that others should

love him too? Equally also by that other great commandment, which requires us to love our neighbour as ourselves; for can we really love him, and not seek to do him all the good we can? Read the following Scriptures with great care and attention: Matt. v, 42–48; Rom. x, 6–13; xiv, 7, 9; Gal. vi, 6–10; Phil. ii, 4, 15, 16, 21; Heb. xiii, 16; 1 John iv, 10, 11.

Young converts should have a clear understanding, a deep conviction, and a very powerful impression of this, that they are called not only to holiness and happiness, but also to usefulness; and should also perceive that no small part of the first two depends upon carrying out the last. Yet they are not always so disposed. They are sometimes so much taken up with the enjoyment of their own personal religion and Christian privileges, as to sit down in luxurious ease, and indolently enjoy the happiness to which they are brought. But let them know and remember, that one of the strongest evidences of our own salvation, is a deep concern and a vigorous activity for the salvation of others. Every true believer should begin his religious course with an intelligent purpose to lay himself out for usefulness, according to his abilities, his means, his situation, his resources, and his opportunities. He cannot be a Christian, who in the spirit of the first murderer asks, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Benevolence must enter very largely into the constitution of every real Christian. And like every other part of the Christian character, it must be ever growing. He must be useful, and as a young man, do good with even limited means and opportunities. He must first be active in that way to which he is most adapted. Then he must look out for something else; for nothing is so

suggestive and inventive as benevolence. His sphere of activity must continually widen, as his experience becomes established, his knowledge increases, his observation extends, and his resources accumulate. Nothing progresses more rapidly in a heart set upon doing good, than ability to be useful. Those who at first are timid, shy, and awkward, in such efforts, soon acquire courage, expertness, and efficiency. It is a sad sight to see the heart contracting, the hand growing slack, and the foot becoming heavy and slow, as the means and opportunity for doing good are multiplied. On the other hand, how beautiful a scene is it to witness the professor becoming more and more both of the Christian and of the philanthropist, as years roll on; till he realizes the description of the Psalmist, that the righteous shall "bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing!"

And what is the crowning grace, the finishing stroke of beauty, and the brightest ray of glory in the Christian character? Humility.

"It is this among other things, and high among them too, which distinguishes Christianity from all the wisdom of the world, both ancient and modern, not having been taught by the wise men of the Gentiles, but first put into a discipline, and made part of religion, by our Lord Jesus Christ; and who chiefly proposes himself as our example, by exhibiting in his own perfect character the twin sisters of meekness and humility. Everything, our ignorance, our weakness, our sins, and our follies prescribe to us, that our proper dwelling-place is low in the deep valley of humility. We have only to compare our present spiritual condition, I will not say with the holy God, the holy Jesus, or the holy angels, but with holy Adam before his fall, to see how low we have sunk, and how entirely by the fall we have lost all ground and all excuse for pride. We have only to look at human nature in general, all corrupt as it is, or study it in our own selves as its epitome; we have only to look back at what we were before conversion, or to look in and see how imperfect even

in our converted state we still are; we have only to consider how strong are our resolutions, and how feeble and broken have been their performance; how many the temptations by which we have been assailed, and with what success against ourselves, to see most abundant cause for humility. You may read for injunctions to this virtue. Prov. xv, 33; xviii, 12; xxii, 4; Mic. vi, 8; Luke xiv, 11; Col. iii, 12; 1 Peter v, 5. But all these injunctions and all possible motives to this grace are bound up in the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that the blessed Saviour hath done more to prescribe, and transmit, and secure this grace, than any other; his whole life being a great, continued descent from the glorious bosom of his Father, to the womb of a poor maiden; to the form of a servant; to the likeness and miseries of sinful flesh; to a life of labour; to a state of poverty; to a death of malefactors; to the grave of death; and to the intolerable calamities which we deserved: and it were a good design, and yet but reasonable, that we should be as humble in the midst of our greatest imperfections and basest sins, as Christ was in the midst of his fulness of the Spirit, great wisdom, perfect life, and most admirable virtues."*

The same author has given us the following signs of humility.

"If you would try how your soul grows, you shall know that humility, like the root of a goodly tree, is thrust very far into the ground, by these goodly fruits, which appear above ground. 1. The humble man trusts not to his own discretion, but in matters of concernment relies rather upon the judgment of his friends, counsellors, or spiritual guides. 2. He does not pertinaciously pursue the choice of his own will, but in all things lets God choose for him, and his superiors in those things which concern them. 3. He does not murmur against commands. 4. He is not inquisitive into the reasonableness of indifferent and innocent commands, but believes their command to be reason enough in such cases to exact his obedience. 5. He lives according to a rule, and with compliance to public customs, without any affectation or singularity. 6. He is meek and indifferent in all accidents and chances. 7. He patiently bears injuries. 8. He is always unsatisfied in his own conduct, resolutions, and counsels. 9. He is a great lover of good men, and a praiser of wise men, and a censurer of no man. 10. He is modest in his speech, and reserved in his laughter. 11. He fears, when he hears himself commended, lest God make another

* Bishop Jeremy Taylor.

judgment concerning his actions than men do. 12. He gives no pert or saucy answers, when he is reproved, whether justly or unjustly. 13. He loves to sit down in private, and, if he may, he refuses the temptation of offices and new honours. 14. He is ingenuous, free, and open in his actions and discourses. 15. He mends his fault, and gives thanks, when he is admonished. 16. He is ready to do good offices to the murderers of his fame, to his slanderers, backbiters, and detractors, as Christ washed the feet of Judas. 17. And is contented to be suspected of indiscretion, so before God he may be really innocent, and not offensive to his neighbour, nor wanting to his just and prudent interest."

And can we present for ourselves a more appropriate and beautiful prayer than that with which Bishop Taylor closes his "Considerations upon Christ's Humility:"

"O holy and eternal Jesus, who wert pleased to lay aside the glories and incomprehensible majesty, which clothed thy infinity from before the beginning of creatures, and didst put on a cloud upon thy brightness, and wert invested with the impure and imperfect broken robe of human nature, and didst abate those splendours which broke through the veil, commanding devils not to publish thee, and men not to proclaim thy excellences, and the apostles not to reveal those glories of thine, which they discovered encircling thee, upon Mount Tabor, in thy transfiguration, and didst, by perpetual homilies, and symbolical mysterious actions, as with deep characters, engrave humility into the spirits of thy disciples, and the discipline of Christianity; teach us to approach near to these, thy glories, which thou hast so covered with a cloud, that we might, without amazement, behold thy excellences; make us to imitate thy gracious condescensions; take from us all vanity and fantastic complacencies in our own persons or actions; and, when there arises a reputation consequent to the performance of any part of our duty, make us to reflect the glory upon thee, suffering nothing to adhere to our own spirits but shame at our own imperfection, and thankfulness to thee for all thy assistances, let us never seek the praise of men from unhandsome actions, from flatteries and unworthy discourses, nor entertain the praise with delight, though it proceed from better principles; but fear and tremble, lest we deserve punishment, or lose a reward, which thou hast deposited for all them that seek thy glory and despise their own, that they may imitate the example of their Lord. Thou, O Lord, didst triumph over sin and death; subdue, also, my proud understanding, and my

prouder affections, and bring me under thy yoke; that I may do thy work, and obey my superiors, and be a servant of all my brethren in their necessities, and esteem myself inferior to all men by a deep sense of my own unworthiness, and in all things may obey thy laws, and conform to thy precedents, and enter into thine inheritance, O holy and eternal Jesus. Amen."

And now, I may ask in the conclusion of this chapter, and as giving a summary of its contents, Are there not certain points of resemblance between natural growth and progressive holiness, which deserve notice? I apprehend there are, and principally the following:

1. It is the order of the natural world for all life, whether in vegetables, brutes, or human beings, to grow. Growth, as I have said, is the law of healthful life.

2. Growth is dependent upon means used to promote it. The child grows in strength and stature by means of his mother's milk; animals in the same way; and trees and vegetables by all the processes and supplies of agriculture and the influences of the heavens and the soil. So is it with religion in the soul: there cannot be advance without the appropriate means, both in kind and measure. These will be the subject of the next chapter.

3. Growth in other things is proportionate in all the parts which belong to them. If of a tree, the roots, stem, and branches all grow together, if the tree be in a sound state. If of a child, all the limbs grow proportionately, and the body, and also mind, keep pace with each other. Disproportion produces monstrosities. If, for instance, the head be larger than the body, or the limbs smaller; or if the mind is childish while the body is advancing to the period of youth or manhood, in either of these cases there is deformity. So it is in

religion. The Christian grows in knowledge, faith, and holiness together. There is, or should be, no spiritual deformity or monstrosity.

4. Growth is very gradual in all life, not excepting the Christian. No plant becomes a tree, no child a man, all at once: so it is with the Christian.

5. Growth is perceptible, not, indeed, in its principles, but in its effects. In the case of a tree or shrub, he who sees it when first planted, and looks at it some years afterwards, will perceive progress. So with a child, seen first as a new-born babe, and afterwards at two years of age. So with a young convert, he who converses with him at his first awakening, and again at the end of a year or two after his conversion, will perceive at the latter interview his increase in knowledge, decision, comfort, and holiness. This, however, will sometimes be more clearly perceived by those who stand by, than by the Christian himself. The child is not at the time sensible of his own growth: and he often, indeed generally, requires to look back and compare what he is now with what he recollects himself to have been, to convince him of his growth. And so it is with the spiritual babe.

"A healthy child," says Dr. John Brown, in his admirable exposition of the Epistle of Peter, to which I am indebted for several of the preceding remarks, "grows without thinking much about its growth. It takes its food and exercise, and finds that it is growing in the increase of its strength, and its capacity for exertion. And an analogous state is, I believe, the healthiest state of the spiritual new-born babe. While self-examination, rightly managed, is very useful, a morbid desire of the satisfaction of knowing that we are improving is in danger of drawing the mind away from the constant employment of the means of spiritual nourishment and health. The best state of things is where, in the healthy vigorous state of the spiritual constitution, ready for every good work, we have the evidence in ourselves

that we are growing; and when that is wanting, application to the sincere milk of the word will do a great deal more than poring into ourselves, to find either proof that we are growing or not growing."

This is very true, very judicious, and very important: but this unconsciousness must not be abused and allowed to degenerate into an utter carelessness about our spiritual state, nor abate that holy jealousy over ourselves, and that just anxiety to grow in grace, without which declension, and not progress, will be our condition. It is quite true that our chief solicitude should be not to neglect, but diligently to use, all the means of progress, rather than to attempt, as by a spiritual pedometer, to be perpetually measuring the ground over which we have passed. A child who does not grow, who finds his years rolling on and adding nothing to his stature, soon becomes anxious about it, and inquires into the cause of his remaining in his dwarfish littleness. And, therefore, when the child of God, or one that professes to be such, makes no advance, perceptible either to himself or others, it is quite time for him to begin to be anxious, to inquire what has stopped his progress, and to apply afresh to all the appointed means for his spiritual advancement.

ADDRESS TO THE READER.

You now see what is meant by progressive religion. Do you understand this matter, and apprehend clearly its nature as well as its necessity? Does that one impressive word growth, stand out clearly defined, luminously seen, impressively felt, before you? If so, immediately enter upon a course of self-scrutiny, diligent, impartial, close examination, to ascertain if there be this progress in you. Again enter into your closet,

shut the door, and commune both with your own heart and with God, and say, as in his sight,

Am I as really in earnest as I once was?

I have changed my situation, do I retain my religion, and have I carried into new circumstances and relations my former earnestness?

Am I advancing in my knowledge of the Scriptures and the great truths of religion, gaining clearer and more distinct apprehensions of spiritual things?

Am I more decided, resolute, and settled, in all my religious convictions and pious habits, than I was at first?

Is my faith stronger and more influential, and am I less troubled with doubts and fears than I was?

Am I really holier than I was? Have I gained greater power over my corruptions?

Am I more spiritual and heavenly, more full of devout thoughts and affections?

Do I improve in my temper by becoming more meek, gentle, forgiving, and kind?

Have I learned to combine more of the generous and free spirit of Christian liberty with an equal advance in holiness?

Am I more anxious about universal and unvarying consistency of conduct?

Is it more and more my concern to be active and useful?

Withal, do I increase in humility? Have I a deeper and deeper sense of my own shortcomings, and a growing disposition to think better of others, and lowlier of myself?

Test yourself, searchingly, by such questions as these.

CHAPTER III.

THE MEANS OF PROGRESS.

This is a subject of unspeakable importance. I must, I will suppose that some after reading the foregoing pages begin to see this subject in a light in which they never saw it before. I will suppose that a new anxiety has come up in their minds now the old one is allayed, and that their great question at present is not, "What shall I do to be saved?" but "What shall I do to be sanctified?" I have already said that means must be used. But what means?

1. There must be a deeper conviction of the necessity and importance of progress, and an intense desire to attain it.

The subject must lay hold of the mind and possess the heart. Will a man increase in knowledge, wealth, influence, who has no desire after it? What object ever was or could be obtained without a conviction of its value, a wish to secure it? Is it not desire that originates the effort, and will not exertion ever be in proportion to the intensity of desire? What prodigious and wonderful efforts have men put forth after an object upon which their hearts were set!

How many professors there are to whom if we were to say, "Well, now you call yourself a Christian, and

wish others to consider you as such, and you are of course eagerly desirous of making continual advances in knowledge, faith, and holiness; and we shall see you evidently becoming more and more like Christ:" who, I say, if we should thus address them, would look wonderingly in our faces, as if they did not comprehend our meaning; or reproachfully, as if we questioned their sincerity; or contemptuously, as if we were indulging in enthusiasm or mysticism, and wished them to be as visionary as ourselves! Of course, such a frame of mind, and such views as these, are adverse to all progress. There must then be concern about the matter. And shall there be none? What, no solicitude to have more knowledge of the truth, more faith in Christ, more likeness to God, more meetness for heaven! No desire to advance in these respects! Is it possible to be a Christian, and yet destitute of this? No, it is not. I tell you, it is not. If you have no concern to grow, there is no life in you. You are a piece of dead wood, and not a living branch: a spiritual corpse, and not a living man. In this state there can be no growth, for dead things never grow: while on the other hand, the very desire will insure the possession of its object.

2. You must enter deeply into that beatitude which says, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." This is a passage too much overlooked and forgotten by most professing Christians. Its terms are exceedingly strong, its sentiment amazingly important. Among all the appetites of our animal nature none is so strong, none so imperiously demands supply, none so constantly returns, none inflicts such suffering when not supplied, as those of hunger and thirst. And these are the appetites

which, in the figurative language of Scripture, are selected to express the vehement desire we should feel after righteousness or holiness: and it is not only one of our natural instincts of this kind, but both hunger and thirst, that are spoken of. It is not the faint and feeble desire for some luxury felt by a person filled almost to repletion, without which, if it be not obtained, he can do very well: Oh, no, but the insatiable, unappeasable desire of the empty, hungry stomach, after necessary food. Such should be the longing of every renewed soul after holiness. Righteousness should be to it that which bread is to the body, and in reference to which we should say, "Evermore give us this bread." It is astonishing and affecting to see with what low degrees of righteousness some professors are satisfied, and how little they seem to have of the spirit of holiness. How very little there is of forgetting the things that are behind, and pressing forward to greater things yet! How many there are who are contented with the average piety of the church and the age, and seem only anxious to stand well in the estimation of their fellow-Christians who are no better than themselves! How few there are whom nothing can satisfy but an ever-growing conformity to the Divine image!

Perhaps there is in some persons a sad disposition to pervert and abuse a passage of most instructive and encouraging, yet cautionary import: I mean the question which was asked concerning the small beginnings in the erection of the second temple at Jerusalem, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" This has been applied also in a spiritual way to the commencement of religion in the soul; and we are told that little grace is better than none at all: that faith is still

faith though it be weak, just as diamonds are diamonds, and gold is gold, though it be in small pieces. Or, to return to the idea already dwelt upon, life is life though it be but that of a babe, and therefore is not to be despised. I know it and admit it. But then if little things are not to be despised, ought great ones to be so treated? And is not satisfaction with little things, when great ones may be obtained, to despise the latter? It is well, therefore, to consider, as Barnes the commentator remarks, that there is no piety in the world which is not the result of cultivation, and which cannot be increased by the degree of care and attention bestowed upon it. No one becomes eminently pious, any more than any one becomes eminently rich or learned, who does not intend it; and ordinarily men are, in religion, what they intend to be. They have about as much religion as they wish, and possess about the characters which they design to possess. When men reach extraordinary elevations in religion, like Baxter, Payson, and Edwards, they have gained only what they meant to gain; and the gay and worldly professors of religion, who have little comfort and peace, have in fact the characters which they designed to have.

3. Great attention to self-cultivation, spiritually considered, is a means of growth. By this I mean what is expressed in one or two passages of Scripture; such, for instance, as the exhortation, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." It is the heart, the great vital spring of the soul, the fountain of our actions, the centre of principles, the seat of motives: the heart, where the thoughts and feelings are which determine the conduct; it is this that must be the first, chief, constant object of solicitude to the

Christian. It is this which God sees, and as He sees it, and because He principally looks at it, that must be ever uppermost in our concern. To keep the heart must mean, exerting ourselves with great earnestness, in dependence upon Divine grace, to preserve it in a good state: labouring to preserve its vitality, vigour, and purity. We must often ask the question, "In what state is my heart? Are my thoughts and affections in a good spiritual condition?" It is, in another view of it, the citadel of the soul: if this be neglected, the enemy at the gates will soon be in and take possession. Set a watch, therefore, upon your heart. Let the sentinel be never off duty, nor sleeping at his post. Keep out evil thoughts, and unholy affections, and vile imaginations. Without great vigilance they will elude observation. As soon as an enemy of this kind is detected, he must be seized and made captive, till every thought is brought into subjection to Christ. As the state of the heart is, so is the man in reality, and before God. Discipline the heart then.

But there is a second passage well worthy the attention of young converts, I mean, where Paul exhorts Timothy thus, "Exercise thyself unto godliness." The word in the original is very strong, and might be rendered by a free translation, "practise gymnastic exercises in religion," like the ancient competitors in the Olympic games. We say also of soldiers in the early stage of their training, "they are at their exercise." They are being trained in what they do not previously know, and cannot perform without being taught; and to learn which, and do it well, requires a great deal of labour. So it is with the Christian; he must, in all that concerns true godliness, learn his

exercise, and be often thus engaged in it. Religion and religious progress cannot be acquired without great pains. As a man cannot be at once a good soldier, while he is a young recruit, and before he has been drilled upon the parade ground, so no one can be an eminent Christian as soon as he is converted, and before he has been at his drilling. Self-improvement in knowledge by the student, and in business by the tradesman, are the result of great painstaking. Nobody can expect advancement without labour.

4. One great means of progress is a constant, earnest, and spiritual attendance upon all the appointed means of growth.

Private prayer is essentially necessary. "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." A spirit of prayer is so essential to personal religion, that it may as certainly be said that the soul in which there is not this spirit is dead, as it may of the body, that it is a corpse if there is no breath in it. Religion is a plant that for growth must be often removed into the shade. It will be scorched and wither if it be always kept in the broad sunshine of publicity. It is the private intercourse of friends that increases their friendship. None can progress in love to God without this private communion. There must be time found and fixed for prayer, and the time fixed must be kept. That which is left to be done at any time, is likely to be done at no time. There is nothing about which a young Christian should be more anxious than maintaining the spirit, love, and practice of private prayer; and nothing which should more

seriously alarm him than any disposition to neglect it. He who makes any excuse for omitting the appointed hour of visiting a friend, must be in a fair way to lose all regard for him.

But there are also public as well as private means to be observed. You must "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." How necessary a right, though not a gloomy or superstitious, observance of this day is to the preservation and strengthening of our piety, is attested by the experience of others, and not less so by our own. It is true, it is a feast, and not a fast, day, and should be kept in the spirit of the New and not of the Old covenant; that is, with joy and freedom, and not with gloom and bondage. Still it must be serious joy. He who passes his sabbaths in frivolous conversation, and levity of spirit; who is not devout in his attendance upon the means of grace; who does not make the best of the precious opportunity to improve his religious condition; who conducts himself much as on other days, except that he does not buy and sell, and goes once or twice to the house of God, cannot expect to get on in religion. Tell me how a professor spends his sabbaths, and I will tell you in what state his soul is, spiritually considered.

A Christian ought to be, and I am supposing he is, a communicant at the table of the Lord. If he is not, he ought to be. It is by way of eminence the ordinance. Apart from any superstitious notion of it, it is a solemn and impressive institute. As creatures formed to be moved, as well as instructed, through the medium of the senses, we are likely to be affected by those symbols of the body and blood of Christ, which, with such awful, though silent eloquence, speak of him

whom they set forth crucified before us. Perhaps there is no ordinance of God, which when observed in a proper frame of mind speaks so forcibly to our hearts, and operates so powerfully upon our whole souls as this. There, believer, there, renew your faith in the crucified Saviour; there, increase your love as you see his love so strikingly exhibited; and, there, by the mercies of God, present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, and well-pleasing to God. There, consecrate yourself afresh each time to his service, as his faithful devoted servant.

Connected with this, is an attendance upon the solemnities of public worship. None who make any pretensions to religion can altogether neglect these. All such persons are there some part of the sabbath. But is it not too obvious to be denied, that the modern habit of living out of town is introducing a most injurious partial neglect of public worship? Once on the sabbath-day, and never in the week, is all the attendance some give to the house of God. Can there be progress where this is the case? Can the soul be strong and healthy upon such scanty fare as one meal a week? It is the man who loves the house of God, who will put himself to some little inconvenience, and will make some sacrifices of ease to be there, who is likely to profit by the appointed means. It is those that are planted in the courts of the Lord who shall flourish, and not those who are only occasionally there.

And then how much depends upon the frame of mind in which, and the purpose for which, this attendance is given. There is a manner of attending upon the means of grace, which instead of benefiting the soul does it great harm. Gospel sermons and the richest devotional

services may harden the heart instead of sanctifying it, and be a savour of death unto death, instead of life unto life. Let us never forget that to be profited, that is, to be spiritually improved in knowledge, faith, holiness, joy, and love, is the end of hearing sermons, and not merely to have our taste gratified by genius, eloquence, and oratory. I know scarcely anything of more importance to put before a young Christian than the necessity, in order to a healthful state of religion, of a right end and object in hearing the word of God. We live in an age when talent is idolized, and genius adored. This is "the image of jealousy which maketh jealous" in the temple of the Lord. With too many it is not the truth of God that is thought of, valued, and delighted in, but the talent of man with which it is set forth. Now we admit that it is almost impossible not to admire, and be affected by, genius. Mind must admire the nobler exhibitions of mind: and cultivated intellects cannot put up with the crude effusions of ignorance or dulness. To such persons, it is not only offensive to taste, but to piety, to hear such sublime and glorious themes as the gospel contains, set forth in vulgar language and mean thought. Who would like to have delicacies served up on broken dishes? Even in regard to books, elegant typography and good paper add to the pleasure of reading, even where the matter is instructive, and the subject of perusal is interesting. But it would argue an ill-regulated mind, in the one case, to be more careful of the elegance of the dish than of the goodness of the food which it contains; and in the other, of the type, paper, and binding of the book, than of the momentous subject on which it treats. It is scarcely possible to give a more important piece of advice to one setting out

in the ways of God than our Lord's words, "Take heed how you hear."

Intimate converse with the word of God is essential to progress. We must neither neglect nor idolize the preacher. The sermon in the house of God, must not displace the Bible from our hands. To be contented with the public ministry, without the private searching of the Bible, is virtually so far to turn Papists, or at any rate to act like them. It is painful to think how little use multitudes make of their Bibles. It is a question which might bring a blush, or ought to do, upon many a professor's cheek, "How many chapters of God's holy word have you read during the last week or month?" Not that the Scriptures should be merely read, for the sake of being read. Some I know prescribe to themselves the task of reading so many chapters every day: and perhaps with much the same motive as the Papist repeats his Ave Marias, or his Paternosters, as a kind of penance. This is not what I mean: and I would at once suggest, that as in eating it is not the quantity of food taken into the stomach, but the quantity that can be digested, which keeps up our strength and promotes our health; so it is not the quantity of Scripture read, but the quantity studied, understood, and applied, that does us good. One verse pondered upon, felt, applied, is better than a whole chapter or book, read negligently, thoughtlessly, and without self-application. Not that a verse a day is enough spiritual food for any one. It may be feared that not a few have abused those little manuals of piety got up for the edification of persons who really cannot command time for much reading; I mean the "Text a day" books, which are now so common. Surely those who can com-

mand time, should hardly be satisfied with such a crumb of the bread of life as this. A real, devout, and intelligent study of the Scriptures, then, is essential to great progress in the life of God. Man lives "not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." To every young convert, therefore, I say, "Search the Scriptures daily. Meditate on the law of God day and night. Try how much of the word of God you can understand, and what is more, try how much of it you can practise. Study the word of God with prayer for Divine teaching. Take up David's petition, 'Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.'" Remember this also, there is much corruption in your heart giving it a false bias, and beclouding your judgment, and likely therefore to lead you into misconception and error. Beseech of God to send forth his Spirit into your heart to purify it from depravity, that your understanding may be better preserved from error. Enter deeply into the meaning and spirit of that remarkable saying of our Lord, "If any man will do his (God's) will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." In this important passage we are taught that the disposition of the heart has much to do with the views and opinions of the intellect. In all moral questions it must be so. A sincere wish and purpose to do the will of God, will be our best way to know the mind of God. An honest heart is the most likely means to gain a correct judgment.

5. A deep conviction and ever-present sense of the need of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by a constant dependence upon him, is indispensable to progress in the divine life. Without this the soul can no more

grow in grace, than the produce of the earth can be brought forth without the genial influences of the heavens. Whatever means are used, and all commanded and appropriate ones must be used, still our dependence for their efficiency must be upon God's blessing. Hence says the apostle: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." First, as in the body, there must be the principle of life, then the activity of that principle. In both natural and spiritual existence, it may be said, in God we live and move and have our being. Agreeably also to this, is the other exhortation of the same apostle, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." This is one of the most instructive and important passages of the New Testament. Let it be observed that this was addressed to those who were supposed to be Christians, who were already saved, though not formally and finally possessed of salvation; and yet they are commanded to work out their salvation. Of course, therefore, it did not mean works for justification, for that was already completed. It means, "Go on working in your sanctification, with a view to the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Go on earnestly in the way of holy walking, even to the close of life, for though you cannot be saved by and for your works, you cannot be saved without them: nor can you be saved unless you continue in them to the end." This is also to be done "with fear and trembling," that is, with all that deep solicitude which he may be supposed to feel, who knows he has at stake an interest so important as an immortal soul. The most confident hope that we are in a state of salvation should not, in the smallest degree, abate our

solicitude about our salvation. But now observe the motive: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do." God's working is not mentioned as a reason why we should not work ourselves, but as an inducement to engage us in an earnest and diligent co-operation with him. The meaning is, God exerts a certain influence upon our minds to produce a certain effect on us: that effect is "to will," that is to "choose" to be holy; "to do," that is to perform holy actions. This effect in us is the end and purpose of his influence upon us. It is not God who will and acts for us, but we who will and act ourselves under his influence. We see in this passage, then, what every young convert should very distinctly notice and constantly remember, the union of human activity and Divine agency. We can do nothing good for ourselves without God's grace working in us; and God's grace never works in us but to lead us to do that which is good, ourselves. We are not to sit down in indolent inactivity waiting for God's grace to set us upon working; but are without delay to begin working in a spirit of dependence upon God's grace. The husbandman sows his seed in expectation of the co-operation of the influences of the heavens; and so must the Christian go to his work. God's grace comes not upon the idle, but upon the diligent.

6. The company, conversation, and fellowship of established and earnest Christians will be of great service to the young disciple. "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." The allusion is familiar, but it is very illustrative. The knife whetted upon the steel acquires a sharper edge. By the intercourse of friends of congenial minds, knowledge is communicated from the more to the less intelligent:

animation, encouragement, and courage from the lively and the sanguine to the dull, the timid, and the gloomy: caution, wisdom, and modesty from the more to the less prudent and discreet: and exhilaration from the joyful to the sad. Hence, then, the necessity and advantage of Christian fellowship and religious friendship, and I seriously and earnestly advise all young converts to cultivate them. They should not remain in solitude, having none with whom to exchange their thoughts, feelings, and solicitudes on those momentous topics which have lately possessed their minds. It is not good for them in this situation "to be alone." Solitary and secluded piety, like the fire of a single coal, burns feebly; but like that is more easily kept alive and kindled to a flame by contact with other coals. Great care, however, is necessary in the selection of companions. This is true in reference to all stages of our Christian history, but especially to the first. Those who are established in the divine life can bear with less injury the influence of persons whose taste, habits, and conversation, are uncongenial with the spirit of true piety, than can the young convert. It is therefore important he should choose for his associates not only those who are truly, but those who are eminently, pious. There is among those whom we may hope to be sincere in their profession a very great difference as regards the degree of their personal godliness. As there are those who are only almost Christians, there are others of whom it may be said, they are only just Christians. While the former seem only just without the line of demarcation between the converted and unconverted, the latter only just within it. Their attainments are so slender, their religion is so feeble, their conversation and spirit are so

worldly and trifling, that it is difficult to determine their real spiritual character. These are not the associates which will help on the young believer. They will damp his zeal and cool his first love. It will be like plunging his knife into earth, which instead of sharpening it, will take off its edge; or like bearing his newly lighted taper into foul air, which will cause it to burn dimly, if it does not extinguish it. Instead of this, the inquirer after holiness and higher sanctification should associate with those who are as earnest as himself, or even more so, whose intelligence will instruct him; whose example will guide him; whose conversation will inspire him; whose cautions will warn him. Let him seek companions whose society will be as a prop round which his own young plant can entwine itself for support and growth, and by whose friendly aid his yet feeble tendrils shall be well sustained.

7. Occasional seasons of extraordinary devotion, self-examination, and humiliation, will be found eminently conducive to progress. I am of course supposing, for I have already prescribed it, that a regular course of private prayer is kept up. But we all know that regularity is apt to degenerate into formality; and what is customary, into mere routine. There may be the most exact order, and the most constant observance of religious exercises, and yet there may be nothing better than a dull round of observances. Hence it is indispensable that there should be occasional seasons of unusual devotion, and that then the soul should take as exact account as possible of its state and condition. What has been already said on the subject of excessive anxiety about growth leading almost to neglecting the means of progress, while inquiring into the reality of pro-

gress, should be borne in mind. But still occasional examination into our religious state cannot be wrong, but must be right. A tradesman who was always taking stock, under a fidgety anxiety about his trade, would only divert his attention from that industry and persevering effort which are essential to success. Still he ought occasionally to do this, or how else can he know how he is going on, and whether he is not going back. So also a nervous person always fearful about his health, and ever inquisitive as to his symptoms, and poring into books to see how ill he is, instead of using all the means of obtaining and preserving health, is not very likely ever to be well. Yet he may sometimes inquire whether some chronic complaints are giving way, and whether his constitution is strengthening. We surely ought not to be less anxious about our soul's health than we are about that of our body: and though a religious nervousness about their souls, which distresses some good people, should not be fostered, still an occasional examination into our spiritual condition ought to be instituted, and is really essential to progress. I do not see how we are to know what corruptions exist and are to be mortified, or what graces languish and need to be revived, without occasional more minute inspection than we give to the subject in our ordinary conduct. In this age, when secular matters are so pressing, I may say, so engrossing and absorbing; when business so encroaches on devotion, and the time formerly given to the closet is taken away to be given to the shop; when all men are living in a hurry, and life itself is one constant bustle; surely, I say, at such a time as this, it is necessary sometimes to step out of the circle, and to enter the closet and press

home upon the conscience the momentous question, "How am I going on in my heavenly course?" Such seasons may be found; and if they can be at no other time, and in no other way, it is worth while occasionally to give up a sermon, and to spend the hour or two which would be otherwise devoted to that exercise, in solitary communion with our own heart, with our Bible, and with our God.

8. This enumeration would be incomplete were I to leave out of it, as means of progress, those various afflictive events with which it pleases God sometimes to try and to shake, but ultimately to settle and strengthen, the faith of his people. Plants and trees not unfrequently, in very dry seasons, require watering at the time of, or soon after, their planting; and, indeed, all vegetable life depends much on the rain and the dew for its growth. Hence God said to the Jews, "I will be as the dew unto Israel." Constant sunshine is unfriendly to vegetation, especially for young plants. Hence God sometimes sees it necessary to darken the soul with cloud shadows, and cause the clouds themselves to pour down their contents on the young convert. Disappointed hopes of a worldly nature, frustrated schemes of happiness, and bodily sickness, even thus early come on some persons, all the more painful and depressing because occurring at the outset of life. "What," says the early sufferer, "must I so soon prove how treacherous are the smiles of the world; so soon learn by experience that man is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward? Must my very morning of life be overcast, and the first stage of my journey be amidst storms? Is my destiny so soon developed to be one of grief and lamentation?" Hush those

complaints, dry those tears, dismiss this foreboding, my young friend. It is wisdom, though you cannot understand it; and mercy, though you cannot at present see it. Have you never read what is said by the weeping prophet, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth?" Observe, it is not said, this is "pleasant," but "good." At the very outset of life, take up the conviction that everything is good for us that is good for our souls; and that God is the best judge of what is good for them. That very disappointment or other kind of affliction which cost you so many tears, such sleepless nights, such distressing days, was just the thing which your heavenly Father saw to be necessary at that time for your spiritual benefit. You were concerned about religion, and seemed in earnest; but you were in danger of being too much taken up with the world which had come out to meet you on your way with smiling face and open arms. The syren song had sent its music into your ears, and you were all but ravished and ruined by the strain. And then God, by the affliction he sent upon you, warned you of your danger, and plucked you from its jaws. Many in your situation have been treated in the same manner, and have at length been compelled to say,

> "Foolish and vain I went astray
> Ere I had felt thy scourges, Lord;
> I left my guide, and lost my way,
> But now I love and keep thy word."

You recollect, perhaps, what God said to the Jews, "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice." It required a change of circumstances to bring them to a right

mind; and that change came and effected its own gracious purpose. Perhaps this may have been the case with you. Full of the buoyancy and eager expectation of youth, it was not likely religion could flourish in such a state of mind as that, and as God had purposes of mercy towards you, he sent trials, that he might effect his gracious designs. How strikingly is it said of Israel, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early." Yes, many, very many, will have cause through eternity to say,

> "Oh, hadst thou left me unchastised
> Thy precept I had still despised;
> And still the snare in secret laid
> Had my unwary feet betrayed."

I entreat you, therefore, to enter into God's gracious purpose, and thus as it were gather grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles, by rendering all your sorrows a means of progress in the divine life. Turn all these painful events to a good purpose to check your vanity, to curb your levity, and to establish you in the ways of the Lord. Let them show you the need of religion as a source of consolation amidst the vicissitudes of life, the power of religion to support you under them, and its ineffable sweetness to console as well as to support you. I just now compared affliction to water, for so is it often represented in the word of God; but not less frequently is it compared also to the action of fire. Perhaps you know that in enamel painting upon china this agent is employed. After the colours are laid on, the article is put into a furnace, and subjected to considerable heat, and this process at once brings out some of the colours more vividly, and gives fixedness and perpetuity to them all. In delineating the Divine image

upon your soul, something like this method of painting may be adopted by the Divine hand, and the spiritual colouring may be burnt in and perpetuated by the furnace of affliction. Consider it a mercy to have the work of grace carried on, though it be by a process so painful as this.

It will be very clearly and, it may be hoped, impressively, seen by these particulars, that real religion is a very great thing, a matter of immense importance and requiring great exertion. Religion, as I have shown you, is a battle which requires complete armour, and the busy use of weapons, in order to secure a certain victory; a race in which many run, but in which few will gain the prize; a narrow path by which many shall seek to pass through the gate of life, and by which the few only who strive shall make good their entrance into the paradise of God. It is only by dint of painful and assiduous striving that salvation is at length secured; and just as the racer may be said scarcely to have won, who with his utmost power and fleetness comes in first by a yard in point of space, or within a moment of the time, so is it said of the righteous by the apostle, that they are but "scarcely saved." This is a tremendous passage, and is enough to awaken "fear and trembling" in us all. The righteous are scarcely saved! They escape from the fire into safety, but as by a hair's breadth. How great is the difficulty of bringing them first to be in earnest about salvation! How great the difficulty of keeping them from turning back or away amidst the temptations to sin, and the allurements of the world, by which they are surrounded! How difficult to rescue them from the power of the great adversary of souls! Through the internal struggles of the mind, and outward conflicts of life, it often seems a

matter of doubt whether, with all their efforts, they will be saved; and when they are saved they will appear to themselves as mariners rescued from shipwreck, who are amazed to see how near they seemed to destruction, and how unlikely to all human appearance it seemed at one time they should be saved at all. Oh, is this true? then how comparatively few are in the way to be saved! Where, I ask, are those who are comporting themselves in a way answerable to such a representation; eagerly, anxiously as for their lives, striving to flee from the wrath to come, and conscious that if they are saved it will be "so as by fire?" Amidst the multitudes who in this day are making a profession of religion, how rarely are any to be seen who are diligently at the task-work of Christianity; who are making a real business of their growing sanctification; who are labouring for heaven as if pursued by a conviction that without effort they will never reach it, and that even after their utmost labours they will but save being distanced, and scarcely reach the goal to which they are tending? Is it not time to sound the alarm, and especially in the cases of those who are just, according to their own declaration, setting out in the pursuit of eternal life?

If any on reading this should say, as did the apostles, "Who then can be saved?" I adopt our Lord's reply, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." To every earnest soul Jesus says, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

ADDRESS TO THE READER.

Now turn back your attention upon the contents of this chapter, with even more solicitude, because of

the greater importance of the subject, than in a time of bodily weakness you would be upon some directions which had been given you concerning your health. First of all, however, ask with serious and earnest concern the questions:

Am I really so anxious to grow in grace, as to be using all the necessary means for that purpose? Am I serving my soul as I do my body, by being careful about my spiritual health, and adopting and diligently employing all proper measures to promote it? Have I solicitude enough about this matter to be active and earnest in the use of the means of securing it?

Do I really want to grow?

Do I hunger and thirst after righteousness?

Do I take pains in this self-cultivation?

Do I constantly and seriously attend all the means of grace, public as well as private, on week-days as well as on Sabbath-days?

Do I constantly, devoutly, read and study the Holy Scriptures, not allowing other books to supplant them? And do I search them to be made more holy?

Do I feel my need of the Holy Spirit's influence, and am I constantly wrestling with God to bestow it upon me?

Do I court the society of the more established and spiritual members of the family of God?

Do I set apart special times for self-examination, humiliation, and prayer?

Am I improved, and made more holy and spiritual, by my afflictions, disappointments, and vexations?

Reader, I beseech you, bring yourself to this touchstone. You cannot progress unless you are anxious and use the means to do so.

CHAPTER IV.

MISTAKES AS TO PROGRESS.

Suppose a man were on a journey of considerable importance to all his temporal interests, and that it was every way desirable he should be going forward with all convenient speed. Imagine also that through ignorance of the country, he should conclude that he was advancing towards his destined point, while at the same time, though in constant activity, he was making no progress, but only wandering about in by-lanes and cross-roads, and still remaining near the spot from whence he started. He might lose the end and purpose of his journey. Now, there is something not unlike this in the course of some persons in regard to religion. They are in motion, but not in progress. The mistakes on the subject are very numerous, and require great pains in those who have to teach, to point them out; and also great attention on the part of all who have any solicitude about their spiritual welfare, in order to be acquainted with them.

1. It is not an unfrequent case for persons to conclude they are advancing, because they are not, in their own view of their case, actually receding. They do not see any outward and visible signs of their backsliding. They have fallen into no grievous sin, and have brought

no blot upon their character, nor discredit upon their profession. Their usual round of duties is performed, and they have not subjected themselves, by any part of their conduct, to rebuke or censure. All this may be so, and yet there may be no progress. Is it enough to stand still on our path? Would it satisfy the man on the journey just alluded to, if he could merely say, "I am not going back?" Would this prove he was advancing? It may be said, and I have already said so, that in one sense not to advance is to recede. Do not compare yourselves with some who are rapidly going back, and imagine that in relation to them you are going forward, while you are standing still. Have you ever, when travelling in a steam-carriage, while your own railway train was stopping at the station, and another was passing slowly in a contrary direction, imagined that it was you that were in motion? So is it in this case. You may be quite at rest, fancying yourself to be moving onwards when you may be only comparing yourselves with those who are really backsliding.

2. Some estimate progress by the time they have been in motion. Suppose a person unacquainted with the rate of speed of a ship at sea, and not understanding the influence of contrary winds and the tides, and the process of getting slowly on by tacking, were to calculate thus, "We have been so many hours or days at sea, and we must therefore be so far on our voyage." Suppose a man on his journey to have fallen asleep, or loitered away his time, and on awaking to take out his watch, and calculate that because he had left home so many hours, he must be getting on very well. Is there nothing like this in some professing Christians? It is

so many months or years since they took up their standing as religious persons. They have been all this while regular attendants on public worship, and communicants at the Lord's Supper. They have heard innumerable sermons, and read many good books. They have outlived the novelty of a religious life, and the ways of God are now familiar to them. How can it be doubted, they say, that they who have been so long on the road are advancing? Ah! this is just calculating progress by time, rather than by distance. Be it known to you, that a professed Christian may be of long, very long, standing, and yet may be but standing without going. A dead stick, however long it may be in the ground, will not grow. Finger-posts stand for ages, and measure distances for travellers, but never advance an inch. Do not conclude, then, that because your conversion is supposed to have taken place long since, that therefore your sanctification must be far advanced. It is a pitiable sound, and argues an imbecile mind, as well as a diminutive body, to hear a poor dwarf cripple say, "I must be growing, for I am ten years old." It may be, but everybody else sees that the poor child's stature never increases an inch. Let the Christian not think of the years he has lived, but the attainment he has made. The length of his profession ought to be attended by an advance in all that constitutes vital godliness, proportionate to the advantages he has had, and the time he has enjoyed them; but alas, alas! how rarely is this the case!

3. There may be an increase of theoretic knowledge, and of ability to talk with fluency upon the subjects of religion, and to defend the truth against gainsayers, without any corresponding advance in spiritual feeling

and holy conduct. There is a great deal of very interesting matter in the Bible, apart from its spiritual and vital power as God's instrument of sanctification. Its history, its poetry, its sublimity, its chronology, its eloquence, its prophecies, its pathos, all may become subjects of study, and even of delighted study, without faith in its doctrines, or obedience to its precepts. Thousands and thousands of volumes have been written on religion by men whose hearts were never under its power. Some of the noblest productions of sacred science have issued from the pens of those to whom, it is to be feared, all was mere theory. Like brilliant lamps, they lighted others on their way to heaven, but never moved themselves: or, to raise still higher the metaphor, they were like light-houses, which direct ships on their course, but are stationary themselves. In more private life and less important attainments, how many have made themselves acquainted with the theory of divine truth, as taught in books, sermons, articles, creeds, and catechisms, so as to be able to explain the orthodox system of doctrine, and to argue for it, while their hearts have never been sanctified by the truth? And even where it may be hoped the great change has been wrought, and a start made for salvation and eternal life, there may be a growth in knowledge without a proportionate growth in grace. Many young persons are now happily engaged in Sunday-school teaching, the distribution of religious tracts, and various other operations of religious zeal, which give them of necessity a growing acquaintance with the system of religious truth. They can talk with more fluency and correctness on divine things. History, doctrine, and precept, are all more familiar to them; and at the same time,

their thoughts are more drawn to the subject of religion generally as the matter of their teaching. Hence, they may seem to themselves to make a perceptible progress. And so they do, in the theory of religion. But if at the same time there is no advance in holiness, Christian charity, conscientiousness, self-denial, and humility, these signs of advance are all deceptive. Their knowledge has been collected, not as the materials of personal sanctity, but of activity. Such acquisitions may be only the "knowledge which puffeth up," but not "the love that edifieth."

There are persons whose acquaintance with Scripture is surprising, but who give too convincing proof that their knowledge is of the letter only, and not of the spirit. I knew a person who was so intimately conversant with the Scriptures, that, if you mentioned any chapter or verse in almost any book of either the Old or New Testament, he would immediately repeat the words; and yet he was altogether an unconverted man. And I was acquainted with another who was so fond of the study of prophecy, that he became more conversant with the predictions of the books of Daniel and of the Apocalypse than any one I ever knew, but was at the same time entirely a man of the world. Yet there are many who regard this increasing acquaintance with the text of the Bible as an evidence of growth in grace. Ask yourselves, then, the solemn question, and ask it solemnly too, whether in proportion as you store your minds with Biblical texts and Biblical ideas, you are all the while seeking to have your heart replete with Biblical feelings, and your life with Biblical actions? Is your advancing light attended with increasing warmth? As you grow in acquaintance

with the character of God, do you reverence him more? As your ideas brighten on the person of Christ, do you love him more? As you become more acquainted with the perfection and spirituality of God's law, do you delight in it more and more after the inward man? As you see more clearly the evil of sin, do you hate it with a more intense hatred? As your horizon widens, do you become more profoundly humble, more tenderly conscientious, more gentle, more spiritual? Unless this is the case, you are in a fatal mistake by supposing you are making progress in the divine life, merely because you are advancing in Biblical science.

4. In some persons there is a growing knowledge of their corruptions, and, perhaps, an increase of lamentation over them, unattended by any disposition or effort to mortify them: and yet this growing light as to the depravity of their nature, and this real vexation, (for so it may be called, rather than godly sorrow,) leads to no proportionate mortification of sin. There can be little doubt that many do know more and more of the plague of their own hearts, and are made continually more sorrowful by it, who content themselves with venting unavailing regrets, and make no progress in removing the evils which they deplore, and yet conclude that this growing self-knowledge is an evidence of growing piety. So it would be if it were followed up by amendment. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance," that is, reformation. And that sorrow is not godly, however pungent it may be, and however miserable it may make the man, which does not produce reformation. Many a holy Christian is made more and more holy, with less of misery on account of sin, just because his grief, whether greater or less, leads to amendment, than he

who, whatever may be his mortification in feeling, does not carry it on to a mortification of sin. It is to be greatly feared that very many professors of religion satisfy themselves with being made unhappy by the knowledge and experience of their sins. They are loud in their lamentations, ample in their confessions, and seemingly profound in their humiliations. But there the matter ends. Those who heard their self-abasing acknowledgments yesterday see them no better to-day.

5. A very common error is to mistake a growth of sectarianism for an increase of grace. Perhaps there is no delusion more common than this. Ecclesiastical polity and sacramental observances, as matters of Divine revelation, are both of some importance; yet it is perfectly clear, from the testimony of Scripture, that they are of less consequence in the divine life than faith, hope, and love. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." If these passages mean anything, they teach us the entire subordination of what is ceremonial to what is spiritual. To see a person more interested in, and more zealous for, some ritual observance, than the cultivation of charity; attaching more importance, whether as matter of experience or of controversy, to baptism and the external forms of the church than to the doctrines of justification, regeneration, and sanctification, marks a state of mind very different from that which is inculcated by the precepts, and manifested in the conduct, of the sacred writers. The great object of the apostles was to cherish in their converts the spirit of faith and the practice of holiness.

Yet we very often see a different line of conduct, both in the teachers and professors of religion in the present day; by many of whom an extraordinary zeal is manifested for established or unestablished churches, as the case may be; and for a more elaborate or a more simple ceremonial; while little concern is felt or expressed to inculcate "the fruit of the Spirit," which "is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." We not unfrequently see young professors, when their first concern about religion is over, taking up with the ardour of eager novices these secondary matters, and becoming zealots for supporting, defending, and propagating them. This is sometimes especially apparent in those who have lately transferred themselves from one section of the universal church to another. Proselytes, as if to prove the sincerity of their conviction, and commend themselves to their new party, usually, in supporting their novel opinions, exceed in zeal those by whom those notions have been long held. A change of this kind has, in some cases, effected a complete transformation of character, and they who before were all torpor, became all activity and energy; not, indeed, for the great fundamental truths on which all Christians agree, but for those minor matters on which they differ. Let not persons of this description mistake such sectarianism for advancement in the divine life. Holy vitality has reference rather to the principles on which all are agreed, than to those minor matters on which they differ. A mighty furor about nonconformity, or a most impassioned zeal for religious establishments, may comport with very little vital godliness; yea, may go far to enfeeble it. Instead, therefore, of such a state

of mind indicating progress, it manifests retrogression. The man has become more of a dissenter or churchman, but perhaps less of a spiritual, humble, and simple-minded Christian. It is the human element in their religion, not the Divine, that has strengthened; the shell that has thickened, not the kernel that has enlarged.

6. Much the same remark will apply to a growing attachment to some particular preacher, which is not always of itself a proof of progress in religion. We are allowed our preference even in this matter: for though it is the message rather than the messenger, the truth rather than the preacher, that is to be the ground of our attachment, yet it cannot in the nature of things be otherwise than that we should prefer one minister to another. He may have been the instrument of our conversion, or the means of our establishment; or, independently of these matters, he may more clearly explain and more powerfully enforce God's truth; or, even without this, his natural abilities, with equal orthodoxy and piety, may be more to our taste: and on all these grounds preference, within certain limits, is allowed. But in nothing does a young convert require greater care and effort to keep from excess, than ministerial attachment, lest it should degenerate into exclusiveness and spiritual idolatry. This is a danger into which multitudes run. They make this pulpit-favourite not only the standard of all excellence, but its monopolist. They think meanly of every one else. They can hear, or at any rate relish, no other. When he preaches elsewhere, they follow him; or, if they cannot do this, they make up their mind not to profit by his substitute. This actually grows upon them, till he is

everything, and all other ministers nothing. Now this very attachment is by some supposed to be a proof of progress, especially in the case of those who formerly cared nothing about this minister or any other. If, with their preference for him, they united a delight in hearing all who preach the same truths, and his preaching had formed in them a taste for evangelical doctrines, instead of for one man who preached them, this would be a blessed result, and one that would prove advance in religion. Perhaps there are few evidences more conclusive of progress than such a state of mind as is described in the following reflections: "At my first setting out in the ways of religion, I felt a preference for my minister so strong that I could hear with pleasure no other. I was disappointed and discontented if I saw any one else in the pulpit, and thought the sermon scarcely worth listening to. I now see it was more an attachment to the preacher himself than to his message. As my knowledge of divine truth increased, and I became more and more in love with that, I found my delight more and more drawn off from the preacher to his doctrine; till now, with my preference for him above all others still remaining, I am so much taken up with the truth as it is in Jesus, and feel so much more the importance of the matter than the manner, that I can hear any one with pleasure who, with tolerable ability, explains and enforces the glorious gospel of the blessed God. It is the preacher who opens most clearly to my judgment the truth of God's Word, and enforces it most powerfully upon my heart and conscience, and who carries on my growth in knowledge, peace, and holiness, that I love most." There is no mistake here.

7. Somewhat analogously to this, some mistake a growing delight in some particular theory, or some particular parts, aspects, and subjects of the Bible, for progress in the divine life. "All Scripture," to quote this passage again, "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." But all Scripture is not equally adapted to foster the strength and promote the health of the soul. Now it is clear to any one who will attentively study the New Testament, that the truth by which we are sanctified, the doctrine which is according to godliness, the "perfection," which is distinguished from first principles, is the Mediatorial character and work of Christ. This seems to be plain from our Lord's words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." This is a most momentous passage, and deserves the very serious attention of all, and especially of young converts. It is of vast consequence in corporeal health, to know what is the most nourishing food, and what will best sustain the strength and increase the stature of the body. Can it be less so in the health of the soul? Here then, we are told by Him who came to give life, by the Physician of the soul, upon what food the growing Christian must live. In these words our Lord did not, could not, mean to be understood literally. By his flesh and blood, he meant

his body offered up in sacrifice, and his blood shed as an atonement for sin; and by eating his flesh and drinking his blood, he intended nourishing the divine life, by the knowledge, the faith, the contemplation of his death as it is set forth in the Scriptures. The study of everything that stands connected with the death of Christ, whether the types of the ceremonial law, the predictions of the prophets, the narratives of the Gospels, the doctrines of the Epistles, or the sublime visions of the Apocalypse, is the food of the soul, the manna from heaven, the bread of life. This is "meat indeed," and "drink indeed." It is not the study of merely the natural history, chronology, historical facts, beautiful poetry, pathetic narratives, or sublime composition of the Bible, that will best sustain our strength; and yet some are attempting it thus. They see many beauties in the Bible to which they were formerly blind. They are enamoured with the sublimities, for instance, of the book of Job or Isaiah. They admire the wondrous wisdom of the book of Proverbs. They luxuriate amidst the pathos of the history of Joseph, or the morality of the Sermon upon the Mount. Their attachment to those parts of revelation is rather growing than declining, and in proper measure all this is highly commendable. Such books as Gilfillan's "Bards of the Bible," and Kitto's "Daily Readings," should be read, and cannot be read without admiration, and exquisite delight, and valuable information. And many do read them with these feelings, and hence they imagine they are progressing in religion, although they have little relish, perhaps, for the doctrines of the gospel, the mediation of Christ, the salva-

tion into which the prophets inquired diligently, and the angels desired to look. They do not feed on the flesh and blood of the great Sacrifice.

8. There may be a mistake made, by the mortification of some one sin, while others are left unsubdued. It is so far an advance, if one enemy of our soul be destroyed from right motives and by right means. And in the work of spiritual improvement it is wise and well, instead of losing our time and wasting our energies in mere general and unsystematic mortification of sin, to select some one sin to begin with in the way of direct and concentrated attack: and no doubt the crucifixion of that corruption, the cutting off of that right hand, or the plucking out of that right eye, is a gain in sanctification, a step in advance, and a means of gaining other victories. But what I am anxious to guard you against is, the supposition that because some one evil to which you may be more strongly tempted is abandoned; or some one practice which may militate against your health, or interest, or comfort, is given up, you are going on. Sin may be discontinued for various reasons. A drunkard may give up his inebriety, not because it is sinful, but hurtful to him. Another may discontinue some fraudulent practice, not because it is forbidden by God, but because it is disgraceful in the estimation of man. A young professor may give up some ensnaring worldly amusements, not because he is afraid of their influence upon his spiritual welfare, but because they make too great inroads upon his purse. It is not therefore only the abstract abandonment of a sin, but the motive which leads to it, which is a proof of the work of grace. "How shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" This must lie as the motive at

the base of all mortification of sin. And then, moreover, the destruction of any one sin must be viewed and carried on as a part of a purpose and effort for the destruction of all sin.

I now proceed to enumerate and to correct some mistakes of a contrary nature to those just considered. I mean such as are committed by those who are making progress, and yet are somewhat anxious and distressed under supposition that they are not making it; and are even fearful that they are declining.

Cases are perhaps not few of persons deeply concerned about salvation, really earnest in religion, and yet harassed with the apprehension that they are at a stand still, or even going back. They have a sincere desire to advance in holiness, and to increase in spirituality; and they are even diligent in the use of means to accomplish that end. In reference to them, I do not hesitate to say, that their very state of mind is itself an evidence of progression. This solicitude is itself advancement. The very desire of improvement, the will to go on, the longing after greater attainment, is improvement. It is itself an impulse, a forgetting the things that are behind, and a reaching forward unto those things that are before. There cannot be a more convincing proof of halting or retrograding, than complacency in ourselves. While on the other hand, a growing disposition to find fault with ourselves, and humble ourselves, and really improve ourselves, is one of the brightest indications of our going forward, provided there is all diligence in the use of the means of self-improvement.

Some are fearful that they are not making progress because their feelings are not so vividly excited by religious matters as they formerly were. They are not as

easily and powerfully wrought upon either in the way of joy and sorrow, hope and fear, as they once were. They have not those lively and ecstatic states of mind which they experienced when they began the divine life.

Here I must just glance at the constitution of our mental nature. Religion exerts its influence over all the faculties of the soul: it calls into exercise the understanding, engages the determination of the will, moves the affections, and quickens the conscience. The same differences of natural constitution will be observable in some degree in the new or spiritual nature as existed in the old or physical one. A person of great sensibility in ordinary things will, after conversion, be so in spiritual ones; while those of little emotion in the former will exhibit the same character of mind in the latter. The sensibility or emotional state of the mind depends very much, therefore, on our physical organization. Now it is a very wrong criterion of the reality and degree of our religion to judge of it only by the exercise of the affections. Some persons of excitable natures are easily moved to joy and sorrow, hope and fear. The power of poetry or eloquence, of sights of distress or happiness, over their feelings is irresistible; while at the same time their judgments are not proportionately employed, their wills not in the same measure engaged, and their conscience but little moved. Take, for instance, the sentimental readers of novels, how by fits they are melted to tears, or excited to ecstasies. Yet how idle and unemployed are all the other faculties of the soul! There is no virtue in all this. It is mere sympathetic emotion. Look at the philanthropist. He may not be a man of tears, or

of strong and vivid emotions of any kind, but he is a man of principle. His understanding comprehends the circumstances of some case of deep distress, and he judges it right to pity and relieve it. His heart, though not wrought up to extreme anguish, so as to fill his eyes with tears, and his mouth with loud lamentations, feels for the miserable object; his will resolutely determines at once to help him; and his conscience, which would condemn him if he did not, approves the determination. You will particularly notice what constituted the virtue of the good man: not only his emotional excitement, for there was very little of that, but the dictate of his judgment, the determination of his will, and the action performed under their joint influence. So it is in religion, which consists in the exercise of all the faculties, but chiefly of the judgment, will, and conscience. The heart is, of course, engaged, for we must love God and hate sin; we must delight in Christ and fear the wrath to come; but the amount of vivid emotion is of little consequence, compared with an enlightened judgment, showing us clearly what is right and wrong, a determined will to avoid the evil and perform the good, and a tender conscience shrinking from the least sin. Emotion is, to a certain extent, instinctive, involuntary, and irrepressible. Not so is it with the judgment, will, and conscience. It is not, therefore, the amount of feeling, but of willing and doing, and approving or condemning, that determines the state of religion. I know there is such a thing as losing "first love," and, alas! it is very common, and is marked by our Lord with his disapprobation in his address to the church at Ephesus; but many distress themselves on this account who have no need to do so. Their ardour,

perhaps, at first, was in some measure the excitement of animal feeling, which soon died away of course, though their real practical love may not have been diminished, but have been growing stronger. When a son returns home after a long absence, especially if he be a reclaimed prodigal, and meets his parents, brothers, and sisters, there is a glow of feeling, a joyousness of emotion, which cannot be expected to continue always, and which he may never be able to recall, though he may be ever growing in real attachment to his friends and his home. From all this it will be seen that the emotional part of religion may be, and is by many, over-estimated. The question is not merely what we can feel, but what we can do, for Christ; not how many tears we can shed, but how many sins we can mortify; not what raptures we can experience, but what self-denial we can practise; not what happy frames of mind we can enjoy, but what holy duties we can perform; not simply how much we can luxuriate at sermon or sacrament, but how much we can exhibit of the mind of Jesus in our intercourse with our fellow-men; not only how far above earth we can rise to the bliss of heaven, but how much of the love and purity of heaven we can bring down to earth: in short, not how much of rapt feeling we can indulge, but how much of religious principle we can bring to bear on our whole conduct. It is evident, therefore, there may be progress where there is a fear that there has been declension. The vividness of feeling may have subsided, but if the firmness of principle has been strengthened, it is only like the fall of the blossom when the fruit has set. The joy may not be so great, but it may be more intelligent, more solid, and more sober, just as the exuberant

delight of the child, when it passes off, leaves the pleasure of the youth less noisy, but more rational. The feelings and frames of mind may be less rapturous, but they may at the same time be less idolized, less depended upon, less put in the place of Christ. The young Christian is less pleased with self, but sees more of the glory of the Saviour: his own righteousness appears more imperfect and defiled, and is therefore less loved, but the righteousness of the Saviour comes out before him more beautiful, glorious, and necessary.

Distress is sometimes felt in consequence of mistaking a clearer view and deeper sense of depravity for an actual increase of it. This is by no means an uncommon case. The young Christian seems sometimes to himself to be growing worse, when in fact it is only that he sees more clearly what in fact he really is. In the early stages of religion we have usually but a slender acquaintance with the evil of sin or the depravity of the heart. The mind is so much taken up with pardon and eternal life, and even indeed with the transition from death to life, that it is but imperfectly acquainted with the depths of deceit and wickedness which lie hid in itself. And the young convert is almost surprised to hear older and more experienced Christians talk of the corruptions of their nature. It is almost one of the first things one should suppose they would feel, yet it is one of the last they effectually learn, that upon earth religion is a constant conflict in man's heart between sin and holiness. At first they seem to feel as if the serpent were killed, but they soon find that he was only scotched, for by the warmth of some fiery temptation, he is revived, and hisses at them again, so as to require renewed blows for his destruction. Nothing astonishes

an inexperienced believer more than the discoveries he is continually making of the evils of his heart. Corruptions which he never dreamed to be in him, are discovered by some new circumstances into which he is brought. It is like turning up the soil which brings out worms and insects that did not appear upon the surface. Or, to vary the illustration, his increasing knowledge of God's holy nature, of the perfect law, and the example of Christ, is like opening the shutters, and letting light into a dark room, the filth of which the inhabitant did not see till the sunbeams disclosed it to him.

Sometimes the young convert is discouraged, because he does not increase as fast as he expected; and supposes that he does not advance at all, because he does not accomplish all he looked for, and as speedily as he had expected. Such expectations are as irrational as the child's, who sowed his seed in the morning, and went out in the evening to see if it was above ground. The recent convert sometimes imagines that sanctification is easily acquired, and that advance, for a regenerated soul, is a thing to be accomplished by a succession of strides, if not, indeed, by one or two bounds. But the remains of old Adam within him soon prove too strong to allow this unimpeded course of Christian progression.

Some mistake, by supposing they do not advance at all, because they do not get on so fast as some others. I would by no means encourage neglect, indifference, or contentment with small measures of grace. On the contrary, I urge upon all the greatest diligence. I say, Go on unto perfection. Those who are contented with what grace they suppose they have, give fearful evidence

that they have none at all. To be self-satisfied is to be self-deceived. Still, as in nature so in grace, all do not grow with equal rapidity, or advance to equal strength and stature. It is so with flowers in a garden, trees in a plantation, children in a family, boys at school, ships at sea, or travellers upon the land. There is progress in all, but in different degrees. The use we should make of the superior attainments of the more eminent of God's servants is neither to envy them, nor to discourage our own hearts, but to find in them a stimulus and an encouragement to seek larger measures of faith and holiness for ourselves.

ADDRESS TO THE READER.

Reader, this is an unspeakably important chapter for you to ponder. You must not pass from it in haste, but linger, and muse longer and deeper. You must now take up the candle of the Lord, as I have said, and go down into the very depths of the soul, to search its hidden recesses. Nor should you trust to your own inspection and scrutiny. Like David, you should earnestly pray to God to search you, and reveal your real state to you. He knew how prone we are to self-love and self-deception; how sin lies hidden in the folds of the heart's deceit, and therefore he begged the trial and scrutiny of eyes more piercing and less partial than his own. So must you. We are all liable to judge too favourably of our own case. Do, do, consider the fatal, the dreadful, the eternal consequences of a mistake on this subject. Oh, the idea of imagining we are going on to heaven, when step by step we are advancing to hell. Is this possible? It is; and the very possibility should awaken our alarm. Is it probable? It is; and

this should increase our alarm. Is it certain? It is; and this should raise still higher our anxiety. Is it common? It is; and this should carry our solicitude to the highest pitch. What said Christ? Read with awe and trembling, Matt. vii, 21–23. Read, I say, this passage in which our Lord with his own hand rings the tocsin and sounds alarm through the whole church. Ought you not to examine? Is not there need of it? Is it not all but madness to go on without it? Mistake! What, in such a matter as salvation? Mistake! What, in a matter in which an error will require, as I have often said, an eternity to understand, and an eternity to deplore!

Are you quite sure this is not your case? Take up the subject, then, and put the following questions to your soul:

Am I right, and tolerably sure that I am so, truly converted to God, a real Christian?

If I am a true Christian, am I really an advancing one, or am I mistaking a declining state for an advancing one?

Am I mistaking a lengthened term of profession for genuine improvement?

Am I putting increase of knowledge, and of ability to talk about religion, in place of increase of holiness?

Does it satisfy me to grow in knowledge and lamentation of my corruptions without mortifying them?

Am I confounding sectarianism with true piety; attachment to some preacher with love to the truth, zeal for some favourite theory with real regard for the gospel?

Is my mortification of sin confined to some one

corruption, which interest, ease, or reputation may require me to surrender; or is it directed against all sin?

Is my religion a mere excitement of the emotions, and my growth only a greater excitability; or is my will more and more determined for God, my conscience more tender, and my life more holy?

Inquire, I beseech you, into these things. Be determined, by God's grace, to know the real state of the case, and to be under no mistake. Be this your prayer, "O God of truth, thou that searchest the hearts and triest the reins of the children of men, thou knowest I would not for ten thousand worlds be deceived about my spiritual state. Do thou, who knowest me altogether, make known to me what I really am in thy sight. Painful as it would be to find out that I have been deceiving myself, this were infinitely better than for me to go on in error till the mistake is past being rectified. I want to know my real state. Even if I am a Christian, and yet mistaking declension for progress, I wish to know this also. Let my spiritual insight be clear, my self-acquaintance be accurate. Suffer me on no account to deceive myself, even as regards my progress or decline."

CHAPTER V.

HINDRANCES TO PROGRESS.

It is indeed a melancholy thing for the growth of grace to be stopped; and to see the spiritual child remaining a dwarf. But it need not be so, unless the child chooses it.

I. There is indifference to growth. This was in some measure anticipated where I said that earnest concern and desire are among the means of progress. If so, then indifference must be an impediment to growth. It is not so in nature. A child in health will grow, and does grow without a thought or a care about the matter. He may never have one idea about it; may be as indifferent as a lamb, or a young dove, a tree, or a flower; yet his indifference will not affect his growth. But it is not so with a young Christian. Indifference here is fatal to all progress. Look at this. Indifferent! What, about progress to heaven and a fitness for it? Indifferent! What, about increasing knowledge of eternal truth? Indifferent! What, about increasing in holiness, which is the image of God in the soul of man? Indifferent! What, about the development of that character which is formed by a Divine hand, of heavenly materials, and for eternal ages? Young professor, can you endure the thought,

does it not astound you, alarm you, distress you, to think of being hindered by indifference? Oh, cast it away at once, and kindle into solicitude and concern. Be indifferent to anything, or everything else, rather than to this.

II. Of course, I must not leave out of consideration, but place distinctly before you, the remaining corruption of human nature, and its imperfect sanctification: and this must be considered in connexion with the temptations of Satan. This view of the case has come out incidentally, and may yet come out in other parts of the volume; but, on account of its importance, it must have a separate place assigned to it here. It is well for the young convert to have a very clear and vivid perception of his condition; of what he is, what he has to contend with, and what exertion therefore is necessary to overcome the resistance he meets with in his course. What then is the real condition, and what are the true circumstances, of the person whose case I am now meeting? He is supposed to be truly regenerated, but at the same time only partially sanctified. Sin is dethroned, but not destroyed. His predominant taste and disposition are holy, but his principles have not yet struck their roots very deep into his soul. His purposes are somewhat irresolute, and his inclinations to evil sometimes strong, just because, to use a Scripture expression, "the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other." Satan knows all this, and by methods which we cannot understand, plies the soul with his various machinations and subtle temptations. We need not, for it is useless, attempt to explain the mystery of Satanic influence. It is nowhere laid open to us. One thing, however, beyond

the fact that he does so tempt us, is certain, that he always assails us through the medium of our own thoughts, imaginations, and feelings. Somehow or other he has the power of exciting these. So that our resistance of evil in ourselves is properly the resistance of the devil without us. We are not only like Bunyan's pilgrim, when we first become anxious, setting out with a burden of guilt upon our back; but when, like him, we have lost that at the cross, we have still another burden of imperfections and corruptions to carry, which without great labour and effort will sadly retard us. It must be well understood, that when all external circumstances of situation, and helps, and advantages, are as favourable as they can be, we still have a sad drawback within. We are like a traveller who is on a smooth road, has fine weather, is intimately acquainted with the way, has agreeable and helpful companions, but at the same time is very lame, or has a load to carry. His lameness or load will be a great delay to him, his attention must be directed to it, he must cure or lighten it, or he will make slow progress.

III. Besetting sins are powerful hindrances. "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us," said the apostle. In the case of most persons, there is some one sin to which, from their situation, constitution, taste, or other circumstances, they are more powerfully tempted than to others. Satan knows very well in every case what this is, and skilfully adapts his temptations to it. He is an expert angler, and never lays his bait, or throws his line, at random. Independently, however, of him, the very tendency of the heart is in that direction. That one sin, whatever it be, while indulged, will hold you

back: you cannot get on till it is mortified. Even its partial indulgence, though it may be considerably weakened, will hinder you. Study then your situation, circumstances, and constitution. Is it an unsanctified temper? An impure imagination? A proud heart? A vain mind? A taste for worldly company? A proneness to envy and jealousy? A love of money? A tendency to exaggeration in speech? A fondness for pleasure? A disposition to censoriousness, detraction, and backbiting? Study yourself. Examine your own heart. You must find out this matter, and it requires no great pains in order to know it. It floats upon the surface of the heart, and does not lie hidden in its depths. There, there, is your danger. As long as that sin, be it what it may, is indulged, you cannot advance. Other sins are as unnecessary garments to the ancient racer: this, like a chain round his ancle, or a clog to his feet.

IV. The mistakes mentioned in the last chapter are very considerable hindrances to progress. They should be well studied and minutely examined. On an ordinary journey, errors of this kind will have great influence in keeping back the traveller. He who supposes he is advancing when the contrary is the case, cannot of course get on. I therefore recommend a very close study of that chapter, with especial reference to the subject of this.

V. There are some situations in life very unfriendly to growth in grace. Plants, if they flourish, require adaptation of soil, atmosphere, and treatment. So it is with the plants of grace, the lambs of Christ's flock, the children of God. Religion has to exist sometimes in situations most inauspicious to its growth, yea, to its

very existence. A servant girl, for instance, may be awakened to a serious concern about the salvation of her soul, while engaged in a large family, incessantly occupied, and associated with other servants, who are not only destitute of all religion themselves, but who ridicule and oppose hers; while the heads of the family are also utterly irreligious, so that in all that house there is nothing to cherish, but everything to wither the blossom of piety in that poor girl's soul. Or a young man may be led in earnest to "remember his Creator in the days of his youth," and at the time when this new solicitude is awakened in his soul, he is engaged as shopman in some large establishment where he is surrounded by a number of scoffing, dissolute, and infidel associates, and the master is as ungodly as his servants. Or, a young lady may start in the divine life, in the midst of a gay, worldly, fashionable family. Or, a wife may become seriously concerned about divine and eternal realities, whose husband is entirely a man of the world, and requires her to be of one taste with him, in all his amusements and pursuits. Now can we conceive of anything more unfriendly to earnest, consistent, advancing religion, than these and many other situations which may be easily imagined? Yet growth is required even in them. "Growth!" exclaim some, "why life is scarcely possible here. You may as soon expect pine-apples to grow on the summit of Mont Blanc, or roses and myrtles to flourish amidst the Polar ices, as think of religion thriving in such situations as these." This is to miscalculate its vital strength, and also the mighty power of God. I have known it, and many more have known it, to flourish in all these circumstances. I remember the case of a lady, who within the first month

of her marriage with an ungodly husband, was brought under concern about religion, to which, till that time, she had been a total stranger: and while engaged in the round of all those festive parties and amusements which are customary in fashionable circles on such occasions, had to struggle with this new anxiety awakened in her heart, and subsequently with the opposition of her husband, and of her nearest relatives. Yet, by the grace of God, her piety not only lived, but flourished.

Still it shall be conceded that the situations supposed are, for experience and observation prove it, uncongenial with the growth of grace. It is difficult to keep a standing there, much more to advance. But it is possible: and the very possibility is encouraging. Consider how much is at stake, the soul, salvation, heaven, eternity. Consider how much greater your condemnation will be, if having once been awakened, you relapse again into a deadly slumber. Be duly aware, then, of the difficulty of your situation, and even alarmed at it. Say to yourselves, "How can I stand firm?" If you can alter your situation it may be well to do so: I advise it. You should not be self-confident, and say, "I can trust myself. My mountain stands strong, I shall never be moved. I fear nothing." Then I fear for you. Such a spirit is the precursor of a fall. "Be not high-minded, but fear:" "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Flee, I say, flee if you can; that is, if your present situation be not one of obvious duty, which leaves you no choice. Some of the cases I have mentioned answer to this description, and do leave you no option. The daughter cannot in many instances quit her father's house; nor can the wife the home of her husband. Where this occurs, let there be the

most earnest prayer to God for divine grace, and full unwavering faith in the Divine promise. Let such persons lay their case before the Lord, and remind him of their peculiar need of his most gracious assistance. Let them open the ear of faith, and hearken to his voice. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

VI. Among the hindrances to progress in religion must be mentioned companionship. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise," says Solomon: "but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." We take the tinge of our character from those with whom we associate, and in return give back the colour of our own to them. We are all the communicants and recipients of unconscious influence; just as diseased subjects keep the atmosphere around them infectious. As, therefore, we would preserve our spiritual health and promote the increase of our strength, let us avoid the society of those whose company and conversation are unfriendly to piety. The strength of our convictions, the fixedness of our habits, the clearness and settledness of our principles, and the firmness of our resolutions, must in a great measure depend upon our associates. David said, "I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep thy precepts." As to the choice of good and suitable companions as a means of progress, I have already written about it in a former chapter: but I now speak of the avoidance of unsuitable ones, of such as would be a hindrance to it. And I would, with all the emphasis it is possible to give to written language, conjure the young professor to be most anxiously and

tremblingly concerned about this matter. It may happen that now when first brought under concern about salvation, you may have companions congenial with your former tastes; and some to whom you were much attached, but who are still as regardless of religion as you once were. This is indeed a painful and perplexing situation, and will expose you to considerable danger. You will find it difficult either to dissolve the ties of friendship, or to maintain them without peril to your infantine religion. To withdraw from those in whose society you have spent so many cheerful hours will be like cutting off a right hand, or plucking out a right eye. Well, and are not these the terms of Christian discipleship? Why, in the times of persecution, the saints were often called to surrender husbands or wives, parents or children, for Christ's sake; and can you not give up a friend? Will you risk your religion, and jeopardise your soul, at the shrine of friendship? Do you not know that your religious character must be distasteful to your former friends, and that their pursuits and conversation are now distasteful, and actually injurious to you? Do you not come from their society with your religious ardour damped, your spiritual taste lowered, your devotional spirit impaired, and your conscience offended and wounded by your sinking too deeply into the current of their conversation? Is it not felt by you that there is one subject, and that the most momentous of all, in reference to which you can have no sympathies and no conversation in common? You must withdraw. It is come to this, that you must sacrifice your friends or your souls; which shall it be?

I do not say that this should be abruptly, much less rudely or sanctimoniously done. There must be nothing

at all approaching to the "Stand by, I am holier than thou." It may be well, first of all, by letter or personal intercourse, to endeavour to influence your friends to adopt similar views to your own; to use all the gentle and unassuming arts of affectionate persuasion, to induce them to go with you in the ways of wisdom and the paths of peace. If you prevail not, then, after a full and fair trial to engage them in the bonds of a sacred fellowship, with tenderness, and frankly stating your reasons, withdraw from them. It may be a costly sacrifice, but it is a necessary one.

How much more forcibly does this apply to that one friend, who above all others is dearest to the heart, and likely on that account to be more influential over the character. Where this tender engagement has been formed before the religious feeling was excited in either of the parties, it should be only a very hostile attitude against religion in one of them that should induce the other to dissolve the bond. In such a case there is sometimes little trouble, for enmity against God goes far to extinguish love towards man, and the pious party is released by the other from vows always solemn, and never to be broken without justifiable reasons. But where no engagement of this nature has been formed, and the young professor is free to choose or to receive, surely, surely, a due regard to the happiness of both parties, the safety of the soul, the pursuit of salvation, the commands of Scripture, and the glory of God, should lead to a determination never to form a connexion unfriendly to the interests of personal religion. It is impossible to conceive of anything more likely to exert a deleterious and destructive influence over incipient piety, than a cherished regard for, and an

avowed engagement to, a person who is a stranger to vital godliness. Even those who having long been in the bands of matrimony, are brought under the power of godliness, find it difficult to maintain it in its vigour and consistency, against the hostile or even neutral influence of a husband or a wife who has no sympathy with them in this most momentous of all concerns. How much more unlikely is it that one who is in all the solicitudes, emotions, and agitations of courtship, and that in connexion with an individual who has no religious sensibilities, can hold on the way and wax stronger and stronger. It is by no means favourable to the cultivation of true godliness, in its earliest stages, to have the mind occupied by a subject so engrossing and so interesting to the hearts of the persons concerned as courtship, even where it is between persons both of whom are partakers of true religion. How much more, then, where this does not enter into the character and pursuits of one of the parties concerned!

VII. The inconsistencies, shortcomings, or stationary condition of those who already make, and perhaps have long made, a profession of religion, are a great impediment to the advance of those who are just beginning the Christian life. Instead of studying their obligations in the Word of God, and taking all their ideas from thence, and finding there the proper models of character, many look around upon the Christians with whom they are acquainted, with a kind of tacit idea that if they themselves are as holy, and earnest, and spiritual as those persons, it is all that can be expected from them. They imagine that those who are so young in piety can hardly be supposed to be as holy, spiritual, and earnest as those who have been long in

the way. And what do they see in these older Christians, in whom at one time, perhaps, they looked for an almost perfect exhibition of spiritual excellence as the natural result of long experience and rich advantages? Ah, what indeed! Oftentimes low attainments, prevailing worldly-mindedness, unsanctified tempers, and general unloveliness of character. Instead of resembling trees in the meridian of their age, lofty in stature, spreading out their branches, rich in foliage, and laden with fruit, they see stunted, almost branchless, leafless, and fruitless stocks, calling for the gardener's order, "Cut them down: why cumber they the ground?" Others perhaps are not in so bad a condition as this, but still far from what our Lord describes as bearing "much fruit" and so glorifying God. Here and there they discover some one in an eminent degree growing like a cedar in Lebanon, or flourishing like the palm-tree. But they are the exceptions, rather than the rule. The young inquirer, therefore, instead of looking at the exceptions, too often turns to the general rule, and secretly thinks that he can hardly expect to be among the rarer instances of godliness, and contents himself with possessing the average amount of it. There may be no actual, formal, deliberate making up his mind in this way, after general observation: but an unconscious and unintentional influence of this kind comes over his mind. It was only the day before this was written a friend informed me of a case he knew, of a young female servant who was brought under the power of religion, and wishing to be in a situation favourable to the growth of her piety, she went into a family professing godliness, where she hoped to find everything to foster her early impressions. Per-

haps, as is commonly the case, she expected too much, all but perfection; but she saw so little true religion in either master or mistress, so much worldliness, and such an absence of everything to encourage her in her recent impressions, that she found herself in almost as much danger there as in the place she left. It had nearly proved too much for her weak faith, and she had well nigh returned again to her former state of careless unconcern. However, by God's grace, she was preserved from falling, and afterwards recovered her standing and progress, though certainly not by any help she gained from this worldly-minded couple whom she served.

I must earnestly caution young disciples against the pernicious influence of example. They must not allow themselves to be rendered slow in their pace because others before them are so; nor to be checked in their speed, either by a false modesty which would lead them to conclude it would be presumption to pass their seniors; nor by an indolence which would but too easily lead them to be satisfied with keeping a little behind them. No doubt it has sometimes happened that Satan has puffed up the mind of some young ardent minds, when in all the fervour of their first love, with vanity and conceit, so that they have become somewhat proud of their own ardour, and still more censorious upon the lukewarmness of others. There cannot be either a more unlovely or a more injurious disposition than for a person lately brought under the power of religion to set up for a public censor, and deal out with unsparing hand his reflections and reproaches upon the characters and conduct of his neighbours. It is sufficiently offensive in ordinary life to see one who is little beyond a beardless youth becoming "Sir Oracle," and

presuming to scan and censure men old enough to be his fathers; but it is still more disgusting to see this in reference to religion; and we would most seriously warn all young disciples against such a temper, and admonish them to cultivate, among other virtues, the charity that doth not behave unseemly.*

VIII. There is another hindrance to progress, which in some periods of history, and some external states of the church of Christ, has been found fatally successful in the case of thousands, I mean persecution.

Persecution has not ceased, and never will, as long

* There is a very affecting and impressive illustration of the influence of professors, in the way of giving advice to a young convert, in the history of Roger Miller, that extraordinary city missionary, who was killed by a railway accident at Wolverton in the year 1847; and a most interesting memorial of whom has been published by Mr Orme. Soon after he became awakened to a sense of religion and had entered into church fellowship, he opened a shop as a barber, and, like the rest of the trade, served his customers on the sabbath. At length he considered that this was a violation of the sanctity of the Lord's day, and he determined to close the shop and trust Providence for his support. His faith in God, however, at that time was weak, and as his business fell off, he was, as might have been expected, reduced to considerable straits in his circumstances. He sustained the trial for some months, when a fellow-professor and member of the same religious community, persuaded him to be less scrupulous. Unhappily he listened to this advice. And now mark the consequence. "In a short time after," he says, impressively and instructively, "all my real enjoyment in religion, and all my desire to attend the means of grace, were gone." "To what appalling circumstances," says his biographer, "does one false step give rise. In his case many dark years of open apostacy and extreme irreligion and vice ensued, and innumerable troubles, both temporal and spiritual, all ensued from this single act." And all must be traced up to that fatal advice of a professing Christian. Oh, professors, take heed what counsel you give, as well as what examples you set, to young converts.

as society is composed of the righteous and the wicked. The apostle's words will be found to be quite true: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." The essence of persecution lies in subjecting a person to injury, pain of body or mind, or some inconvenience, on account of his religious opinions or conduct, whether it be done by public unjust laws, or by private ill treatment. If a person be made the butt of ridicule or scorn by his companions or others, for his religion, he is persecuted; and perhaps there is nothing more hard to bear than this: no test of steadfastness more severe. A young man who becomes pious, if in a large establishment, is sure to be the object of all kinds of unhallowed mirth and sport, and if amidst all, he remains firm, inflexible, and constant, is as truly a confessor as he who goes to prison. It is scarcely possible to conceive of a harder trial of constancy than this. Many have given way. They could not stand it; and have escaped the pitiless storm of ridicule by taking shelter in apostasy. And where they have not altogether abandoned their religion, have put the "candle under a bushel," and concealed their opinions and feelings, so that to others they appeared to have given them up. This is as truly denying Christ as open apostasy; and is the very case to which he alludes when he says, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels." Christ will have no secret disciples. He that has faith must confess it before men. Rom. x, 9–11. In many cases it may be well, where the opposition is too hard to be borne,

to quit the situation, though it is a noble instance of moral heroism to endure it bravely, "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

But there are other cases, in some respects more trying than even this, I mean where a young person, especially a female, becomes decided in spiritual religion in the midst of a wealthy family; where not one is found to countenance her, and all oppose her. She cannot do many things she once did without scruple or hesitation. Some of their amusements offend her conscience, and she declines them. She is now considered by her strictness as condemning all the rest, and is reproached as an accuser and reprover of the family, not excepting her parents. She is charged with being a divider of the household, and as having introduced discord and strife. It is most trying for her to endure the anger and meet the frowns of father and mother, brothers and sisters; to be considered and reproached as the disturber of the peace of a once happy and united family. What firmness of principle, what inflexibility of purpose, what martyr-like constancy, what a power of Divine grace does this require!

Let those who are thus tempted consider the consequences of giving up their profession. Let them read with solemn awe the passages of Scripture already quoted. For their encouragement let them take up their Bibles, and read our Lord's words in his sermon on the mount. Let them also peruse the beautiful language of the apostles, 1 Pet. iv, 12–19; 2 Tim. ii, 11–13; Heb. xii, 1–13. Let them wrestle with God for his grace to assist them, and cast themselves upon his promised aid, expecting that he will uphold them.

It should be accounted by them an honour and a glory to suffer for Christ. They should bear all with patience, meekness, and forgiveness. A quiet and gentle sufferer will in most cases subdue even a hard-hearted oppressor. There is a wondrous power in consistent and unvarying meekness.

IX. A taste for worldly amusements will inevitably prove, wherever it is indulged, a powerful obstacle to growth in grace. Man is unquestionably made for enjoyment. He has a capacity for bliss, an instinctive appetite for gratification, and for this God has made ample provision of a healthful and lawful kind. "A taste for pleasure," however, means something different from this; either that pleasure is sought from wrong sources, or is carried to excess. There are some amusements which in their nature are so utterly incompatible with true religion, that a liking for them and a hankering after them, and especially an indulgence in them, cannot comport with real, earnest, and serious piety. A taste for them is utterly uncongenial with a spirit of godliness. Such is a love for the gay and fashionable entertainments of the ball-room, and the routs and parties of genteel life. These are all unfriendly to religion, and are usually renounced by persons intent upon the momentous concerns of eternity. A love for them dies out from the soul agitated and made anxious by the great question, "What shall I do to be saved?" I would not doom to perdition all who are at any time found in this round of worldly pleasures: but I unhesitatingly say, that a taste for them is entirely opposed to the whole genius of Christianity. They are all included in that "world" which

is overcome by faith and the new birth. Religion is, though a happy, a very serious thing, and can no more live and flourish in the heated atmosphere of those parties, than can a plant brought from the frigid or temperate zone, under the burning rays of a tropical sun. But in this pleasure-loving, pleasure-seeking, and pleasure-inventing age, there is a great variety of amusements perpetually rising up which it is impossible to say are sinful, and therefore unlawful. Yet the supposition of their lawfulness viewed in connexion with their abundance, variety, and constant repetition, is the very thing that makes them dangerous to the spirit of true religion. A taste for even lawful worldly amusements, which leads its possessor to be fond of them, seeking them, and longing for them, shows a mind that is in a very doubtful state as to vital piety. It looks as if such a person had not yet entered into the Saviour's words to the woman of Samaria, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

I do not like to be asked, as I sometimes am, the question, "whether such and such doubtful amusements are compatible with religion?" That is, I do not like it, when it evidently proceeds from a prevailing wish to enjoy them, and a desire to get ministerial sanction for indulging in them. It ought not to be necessary to prove that many of these are unlawful; they should be found unnecessary.*

* I am aware that it is pleaded on behalf of worldly amusements by young people, that abstinence from them represents piety as clothed with austerity, and as a species of penance, and

ADDRESS TO THE READER.

It is a fearful idea to think of hindrances in the way to heaven, impediments to holiness. If there were any thing that hindered your health, or prosperity in business, or the success of any earthly scheme whatever, how earnestly you could ask the question, "What is it; what is it?" How thankful you would be to the friend who pointed it out, and how diligently you would set to work to take it out of the way. Well, there are impediments in your way to Zion. You are hindered. You do not perhaps make progress. How is this? I say to you what the apostle did to the Galatians, "Who did hinder you," or what? Look back through this chapter; take

that religious people should go as far as they can in these things to disprove the calumny. There is something perhaps in this; but it requires to be very narrowly watched. For, without caution, see how far it would carry us. Those who indulge in pleasures which no religious person could ever engage in, may say that all persons must have a very melancholy religion who debar themselves of their pleasures. So that objections to amusements, though I concede, they may be excessive and almost ridiculous, should not be so beaten down as to make way for a latitude dangerous to personal godliness. A Christian is not to partake of the pleasures of the world in order to prove that his religion does not debar him from enjoyment; but he is to let it be seen by his "peace that passeth understanding," and his "joy unspeakable and full of glory," that his religion gives far more enjoyment than it takes away: that, in fact, it gives him the truest happiness. The way to win a worldly person to religion is not to go and partake of his amusements, but to prove to him that we are happier with our pleasures than he is with his: that we bask in sunshine while he has only a smoking taper: that we have found the "river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," while he is drinking of the muddy streams which issue from the earth.

up every particular; say of each, Is it this, or this, that stops my progress? I ask you, and I implore you to ask yourself,

Is it indifference to the subject?

Is it the unsubdued corruption of your nature, left to itself, unresisted, unmortified?

Is it an easily-besetting sin?

Is it one of the mistakes mentioned in the last chapter?

Is it that your situation is peculiarly unfriendly to a life of piety?

Is it unsuitable companionship?

Is it the inconsistencies of professing Christians?

Is it a taste for worldly amusements?

Is it persecution?

Examine, I beseech you, examine what it is that arrests you in your course, and take it away. Again, I say, "Gather out the stones."

CHAPTER VI.

MOTIVES TO PROGRESS.

It might be supposed progress would be itself a motive. Who, having entered on a course leading to wealth, needs to be admonished to proceed in it? Do the men who have gone to the gold-fields, and who have begun to find the precious metal, need to be stimulated to go forward? And yet we do find that in reference to some earthly objects of pursuit, and valuable ones too, where self-denial, sacrifice, and surrender of present gratification for future benefit are required, much persuasion is sometimes necessary to keep a man in continuous exertion for the attainment of the desired good. If he has lost his health by excess in the indulgence of appetite, in the way either of eating, drinking, or any other lust of the flesh, and by medicine and moderate diet, and other restraints, he is beginning to recover, how necessary, in some cases, is perpetual exhortation, to induce him to refrain from excess, and to persevere in the denial of his appetite! How earnest we must be in setting before him all the motives which have weight with him in leading him to abstain from what is injurious to his health! So is it in religion. A person, just commencing his attention to this momentous concern, has so many hindrances both from within and

without to stop his progress, that he needs to be urged forward by the voice of affectionate entreaty. He must be appealed to by all that can be brought to bear upon his judgment, heart, and conscience. He is like a man just awaking out of a deep and heavy slumber, about whom drowsiness still hangs, and who is strongly inclined to fall back again upon his pillow and relapse into stupor. You must speak loudly to him, and even shake him with some degree of violence, and compel him to rouse himself and keep himself awake. Such is really the condition of a recently awakened sinner. I now therefore present the motives which apply to his case for making progress.

I. And the first I bring forward is the one just suggested, the danger of declension. I may even add to this the proneness to declension. The progress of a sinner is like that of a stone rolling down hill, which has a continual tendency, each revolution it makes, to increase its speed and momentum: the progress of a believer is like that of a stone up hill, which is not only put in motion by great effort, but when this effort is suspended rolls back again. The stone in either case does not, cannot stand still, but by the laws of matter and motion must go down hill, unless prevented by actual effort. This is impressive, and deserves very serious consideration. If the young disciple does not advance, he will in all probability retrograde.

Declension after we have once made a profession, or been awakened to solicitude, is really a very fearful thing. It is most affecting and alarming to see a person once deeply convinced of sin, and seriously anxious about salvation; who has professedly obtained peace through faith in Christ, and commenced a course

of practical godliness, afterwards either falling again into sin, or sinking into predominant worldliness. Has not this sad spectacle been often witnessed? Have we not seen it in persons who at one time seemed to have had such love to Christ that it might have been fitly called the love of their espousals? They scarcely wished for any other pleasure than that which was enjoyed in communion with him and with his saints; his name was as ointment poured forth; and they loved his very image. The exercises of private prayer, the perusal of the holy Scriptures, and the public ordinances of the sanctuary, were waited for with eager expectation. And what, and where, were they afterwards? Alas, how changed! All their former resolutions were broken, and all their habits changed. Their first love subsided into lukewarmness, and at last into absolute coldness and indifference. Prayer was restrained; public worship neglected; the Bible never opened; the company of the saints forsaken, the love of pleasure gained the ascendancy; and in some cases, open sins that had been forsaken were again practised. The poor backslider himself sometimes has conscience enough left to be made miserable by its reproaches and stings, while those who knew him in his better days, lament over his change, and exclaim in bitterness of heart, "Alas, how fallen!" The sins of such a person have peculiar aggravations. They are committed after the most solemn vows and engagements, and against clear light; and are attended with circumstances of peculiar and horrid ingratitude. After God has poured out upon us his Spirit, taken us by the hand, and led us to repentance and the beginning of a religious course, how basely thankless is it then to turn away from him, and

refuse any longer to be under his guidance. Such departures from God are expressive of the most extreme and singular folly as well as wickedness. Those who commit them, once professed to be happy in serving the Lord. They had seemed to have found rest in Christ. They were no longer running up and down in the world, saying, "Who will show us any good?" but had found happiness in religion. Their judgment was convinced; their heart was satisfied; their conscience was quiet; their whole soul was at peace. But now by turning back again to sin or to the world, they cast all this away. Yet they cannot now enjoy the pleasures of sin or the world as they once did. They sometimes feel they have made a foolish bargain, and have exchanged liberty for drudgery and slavery; peace of conscience for bitter remorse; joyfulness of heart for sorrow and anguish. It is being weary of the government of the Prince of Peace, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light, and putting their necks under the iron yoke of Satan, which crushes them to destruction.

Such conduct also causes the ways of godliness to be spoken ill of. It has the same effect upon many as the ill report of the spies who were sent to survey the land of Canaan, which discouraged the people, caused them to murmur and rebel, and was the occasion of their perishing in the wilderness. The backslider thus perpetrates a double mischief, his conduct is infectious and tends to corrupt those who already believe, while it discourages those who do not. It says to them, "I have tried the paths of wisdom, and do not find her paths, as I was told and expected, to be paths of pleasantness and peace." This is a fearful contradiction of God's Word, an awful calumny upon religion,

and in effect an impious blasphemy against God. Such is the sin of declension and backsliding, and if it go on to apostacy, how fearful! Read what the apostle has said on this subject, Heb. vi, 4–8. Let every young disciple turn to the passage, read the words and tremble. And no less solemn is the language of the apostle Peter, 2 Epistle, ii, 20–22.

It is not only possible, but probable, that some who will read this work will be found by it in various stages of declension already: some who have consciousness enough of their situation, and even occasional regret enough, to borrow the poet's lament,

> "Where is the blessedness I knew
> When first I saw the Lord?
> Where is the soul-refreshing view
> Of Jesus and his word?
> What peaceful hours I once enjoy'd,
> How sweet their memory still!
> But they have left an aching void
> The world can never fill."

To such I would say, Instantly take alarm and tremble at your danger. Let the words of God sound like thunder in your ears, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." He will be a man whom God will cease to regard with approbation. His displeasure, instead of his complacency, will rest upon him. God marks every footstep backward with reproach and disgust. Can you bear to think of this? "Can thine heart endure, or can thy hands be strong," in such a situation? Perhaps the declension is yet slight, only like a speck of disease, like the beginning of consumption, curable if taken in time, but fatal if suffered to go on to after stages. But in whatever degree declension may have taken place, it should excite solici-

tude and lead to immediate efforts for recovery. The counsel delivered by our Lord to the church at Ephesus should be hearkened to with solemnity, and followed without delay; "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works." It is not enough to know that you are declining; or merely to lament it. Complaining alone will not effect a cure. We may sigh and go backward to the last period of our lives. Our chief solicitude must be to recover lost ground. In order to this there must be deep contrition and profound humiliation before God. In such a state we must begin as we did originally, with conviction of sin. The backslider must return through the valley of humiliation. There is no other way for the wanderer. It will be well to inquire diligently after the cause of the declension. What was it that led you astray? begin there in your return. The point where you left the road, is of course the point at which you must return to it. If it was a sin of neglect, instantly take up the omitted duty. If it was a sin of practice, immediately put it away. It will perhaps be somewhat difficult to recover your standing; for as I have said, declension is a down-hill progress, but the way of return is all up-hill. You will perhaps be ashamed, afraid, and somewhat reluctant, to go back. He who ungratefully and ungenerously quits a friend, feels some shyness and backwardness to return, and say, "I have sinned, forgive me." So is it with the backslider towards God. But mark his love, where, even to backsliding Israel, who had so often gone away from him, he said, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive

us graciously: so will we render the calves (offerings) of our lips. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." And to convince you how ready God is to receive you, let me refer you to that wonderfully pathetic passage, where God is represented as a loving father, overhearing the confession and lamentation of his penitent child, and lavishing upon him the fondness of his paternal heart. Jer. xxxi, 18-20. What heart can stand out against the melting pathos of this wonderful passage? What backslider need now fear to return to the Lord?

II. It should be most impressively felt that progression is commanded and expected by God. I now refer you back to the commands of God quoted in the second chapter; and would especially fix your attention on those which enjoin you to seek after perfection. This is a subject which a young Christian should thoroughly understand, but which few do either understand or consider. Misconceptions on this subject are fatal to growth. The verb, "be perfect," and the noun, "perfection," are of such frequent occurrence in the New Testament, that the subject to which they refer ought to engage the close and serious attention of every professing Christian. There can be no doubt that these terms are sometimes employed by the sacred writers in a comparative sense, as signifying high degrees, eminence, completeness of parts. In Hebrew vi, 1, perfection signifies the more sublime, enlarged, spiritual, and complete views of Christian doctrine, as opposed to first principles. In 1 Cor. ii, 6, Phil. iii, 15, to be "perfect," means to be far advanced in knowledge. But there are other places where it is unquestionably to be understood in its unqualified sense, as intending

absolute and sinless perfection; such are, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." And "Make you perfect in every good work." There can be no doubt that in these passages the apostle means entire freedom from sin, an absolutely spotless holiness.

"The apostle does not say," to quote the comment of Barnes, "that this perfection has ever been attained, or is attainable, in this world; nor does he say that it has not been. He only urges the obligation to make an effort to be entirely holy; and this obligation is not affected by the inquiry whether any one has been, or has not been, perfect. It is an obligation which results from the nature of the law of God, and his unchangeable claims upon the soul. The fact that no one has been perfect, does not relax the claim; the fact that no one will be perfect in this life, does not weaken the obligation; it proves only the deep and dreadful depravity of the human heart, and should humble us under the stubbornness of guilt. The obligation to be perfect is one that is eternal and unchangeable. The unceasing and steady aim of every Christian should be perfection; perfection in all things; in the love of God, of Christ, of man; perfection in feelings, words, and plans, and dealings with man; perfection in prayers and submission to the will of God. No man can be a Christian who does not sincerely desire it, and who does not constantly aim at it. No man is a friend of God who can acquiesce in a state of sin, and who is satisfied and contented that he is not as holy as God is holy. And any man who has no desire to be perfect as God is, and who does not make it his daily study and constant aim to be perfect as God is perfect, may set it down as demonstratively certain that he has no true religion. How can a man be a Christian who is willing to acquiesce in a state of sin, and who does not desire to be just like his Master and Lord?"

This is strong and impressive language, and requires the very devout, serious, and solemn consideration of all who are beginning the divine life, as showing them what is to be their aim, their study, and their endeavour, even to be perfect in every good work. Young converts see no perfection in others; they hear it said by Chris-

tians there is no perfection; they feel none in themselves; and therefore never dream that it is their duty to seek after it; and thus reconciling themselves to all kinds and degrees of imperfections, begin and continue with a very low state of religion. I believe that infinite mischief is done to the souls of men, that the profession of godliness is much disparaged and dishonoured, and the lustre of the church dimmed, by a prevalent forgetfulness, and in some quarters a denial, that it is our duty to go on unto perfection. Many are tolerating all kinds and degrees of imperfection, under the plea that none are absolutely perfect. Young disciples have been taught, as one of their first lessons in theology, that as absolute perfection is not attained in this life, it is useless to seek after it, and that they may be very good Christians, even while not only possessing, but indulging many known corruptions. I would not for the world be misunderstood; I would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. I would not say any thing to cast a stumbling-block in the way of the feeblest lamb in all the flock of Christ; and yet I would be equally solicitous to guard such against self-deception. What I say then, is this, not that all imperfections are evidence of an unconverted state, but that the intentional indulgence of them, knowing them to be such, under the notion that a great amount of imperfection is compatible with a state of grace, is so; not that the possession of perfection, but a desire and pursuit after it, is essential as an evidence of sincerity.

III. Progress is a bright evidence of sincerity. Growth, as I have already remarked, is the proof of life. Dead things do not grow. There are few professors of religion in whose minds the question does not arise,

and there are none in which it ought not sometimes to arise, accompanied with deep anxiety, "Am I, or am I not, a child of God?"

Now surely the transition from death to life; the change from an unregenerate to a converted state; the ceasing to be an enemy to God by wicked works, and becoming his child by filial love and obedience, cannot be a change of so trivial, superficial, and undistinguishable a nature as not to be ascertained without great difficulty. It may be supposed to be easily recognised where it really exists. True it is, that the change is in some cases more marked than in others. Where the conversion is sudden, and is a turning from actual vice, or awful infidelity, or even from flagrant heresy, it is more apparent, and more easily determined by consciousness, than where it is the gradual formation of religious character in persons previously correct in their general conduct, and brought up under religious instruction. It is in these latter cases, that doubts and fears about sincerity must be expected more frequently to occur. It is, therefore, in such cases that progress is indispensable as an evidence of sincerity. For it must be recollected that even in these, growth is as essential to life as in the others. Grace never finds in nature a subject for which there is need of little to be done. There may be very beautiful wild flowers blooming, or very good fruits growing, in the wilderness, yet they can be carried on to much higher beauty and much richer flavour, by the culture of the green-house and the hot-house. When the young disciple can say, "True, I have not, as the effect of God's converting grace, to compare a virtuous with a vicious life. I have not to contrast present pious belief with former blas-

pheming infidelity. But I find an increasing loosening from many of my former tastes. The love of worldly pleasure, which even at the commencement of my religious life was strong in me, is evidently weakened, and I find piety more and more the source of my happiness. If a growing conscientiousness to avoid little sins, and to practise minor duties, be a proof of sincerity, I rejoice to say I have it. As regards besetting sins, I have reason to believe they are far more mortified than they were, and that temptations to them have less power over me. My temper, once so irritable and impetuous, is subdued; and I find it more easy to govern my tongue. My prejudices towards those who differ from me in religious opinions have been softened by the influence of Christian charity. If these things be evidence of sincerity, I am no self-deceiver: for I can certainly perceive in myself these marks of progress."

Here I will present a passage of Holy Scripture, which it is of importance every young disciple should "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest." The apostle Peter thus exhorts, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." The things to be made sure are our "calling and election," God's choice of us, manifested by his converting us; in other words, our spiritual character and spiritual safety. To make this sure, or certain, cannot have reference to God, for no act of ours can make more certain anything he does. Nor can it refer to the things themselves, for if a man be really chosen and called of God, nothing that he can do can make these more certain. It must therefore refer to ourselves. God treats us as rational and moral agents, and what may be absolutely certain in his mind, from his mere

purpose that it shall be so, is to be proved to us only by evidence and the free exercise of our own powers. The meaning, therefore, of this passage is, that we are to obtain evidence that this is our condition. And how are we to obtain it? The celebrated Cudworth, in his Sermon on the text, "Hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments," has the following remarks upon the passage from St. Peter, which I am now considering:

"He that builds all his comfort upon an ungrounded persuasion that God from all eternity hath loved him, and absolutely decreed him to life and happiness, and seeketh not for God really dwelling in his soul, builds his house upon a quicksand, and it shall suddenly sink and be swallowed up. We are nowhere commanded to pry into these secrets, but the wholesome counsel and advice given us is this, 'to make our calling and election sure.' We have no warrant in Scripture to peep into these hidden rolls and volumes of eternity, and to make it the first thing we do, when we come to Christ, to spell out our names in the stars, and to persuade ourselves that we are certainly elected to everlasting happiness, before we see the image of God in righteousness and true holiness shaped in our hearts. God's everlasting decree is too dazzling and bright an object for us at first to set our eyes upon. It is far easier and safer for us to look upon the rays of his goodness and holiness, as they are reflected in our hearts, and there to read the mild and gentle characters of God's love to us, in our love to him, and our hearty compliance with Heaven's will; as it is safer for us, if we would see the sun, to look upon it here below in a pail of water, than to cast up our daring eyes to the body of the sun itself, which is too radiant and scorching for us. The best assurance any one can have of his interest in God, is doubtless the conformity of his soul to him. When our heart is once turned into a conformity with the mind of God; when we feel our will conformed to his will, we shall then presently perceive a spirit of adoption within ourselves, teaching us to say, Abba, Father. We shall not then care for peeping into those hidden records of eternity, to see whether our names are written there in golden characters; no, we shall find a copy of God's thoughts concerning us written in our own breasts. There we may read the character of his favour towards us; there we may feel an inward sense of his love to us, flowing out

of our hearty and unfeigned love to him. And we shall be more undoubtedly persuaded of it, than if any of those winged watchers above, that are prying into heaven's secrets, should come and tell us that they saw our names enrolled in those volumes of eternity."

IV. Progress is its own reward. From what infelicity is the advancing Christian protected! He has not the unhappiness which in many, if not in most cases, declension brings upon its subject. But as pain is still a sign of life, even that is better than the insensibility of death. In the case just mentioned, the individual still retains some considerable tenderness of conscience, some religious sensibility, without being supposed to be hankering after the amusements of the world; but I am now speaking of those who are almost entirely dead to religious feeling, and strongly inclined to gaiety, yet in some measure held in check by the last lingering remains of religion. They are still professors, but find their profession only a clog and a hindrance to their pleasures. They see its inconsistency with their tastes and occasional enjoyments, and find it as a drop of bitter in their cup of gratification. Sometimes they wish they had never made a profession of religion. They are morose and ill-tempered with themselves for ever thinking of being Christians, and till they are led to abandon it altogether, which at length they are brought to do, they are, much to their annoyance, checked by it in their course. This is a wretched state of mind; it spoils its possessor both for the world and for religion.

But these are only the negative side of the pleasure of growth; we turn therefore to the positive. And here I would remark, that progress in anything on which we have set our hearts, is always agreeable: and that this applies especially to religion. Viewed in its true nature,

it unites the highest dignity with the purest pleasure. Her ways are ways, not only of pleasure, and paths of peace, but of honour and renown. Can anything be loftier, nobler, sublimer, than a growing conformity to the image of God? To see a stronger and stronger resemblance to God in our soul? To behold the moral attributes of the Divine nature fixed with a deeper and deeper colouring on the character: what to this is the pleasure of the artist in seeing the correct likeness of some great monarch, or some wonderful genius, growing under his hand upon the canvas? How exalted is the pleasure of religion, it is the bliss of angels, the happiness of spirits made perfect, yea, the joy of God's own heart! It is enjoyed under the smile of conscience, and conscience is undoubtedly the great repository and magazine of all those pleasures that can afford any solid refreshment to the soul. When this is calm, serene, and smiling, then the man perfectly enjoys all things, and what is more, himself, for that he must do before he can enjoy anything else. It is a pleasure that never satiates nor wearies. Can the lover of worldly pleasure say this? With him, how short is the interval between a pleasure and a burden!

Take the trio of graces set forth by the apostle, faith, hope, charity: and again I say, to grow in each and all of these is to advance in happiness. Faith is the first source of all true joy to the Christian. "In whom believing," says the apostle, "we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Faith looks abroad upon the whole field of revelation, and in all its facts, doctrines, precepts, invitations, and promises, finds so many separate objects of delight. But it concentrates its attention on Christ and heaven. It looks with wonder, gratitude,

and love, on the cross, and then passes on with similar feelings to the crown of glory. To grow in faith is therefore to grow in bliss, and to put up the prayer, "Lord, increase our faith," is only in other words to say, "Lord, increase our happiness." Here we see the reason why so many professing Christians go mourning all their days, their faith is so weak: and it is of momentous consequence for every young Christian, at his very outset in the divine life, to understand that faith is the branch of which joy is the blossom, and holiness the fruit. Much the same strain of remark may be made in reference to hope. It is easy to see that all hope must be pleasant from its very nature. This is the case with even worldly expectations. Poets have sung "The Pleasures of Hope," and experience has justified and echoed the strain. The apostle in describing the Christian state of mind in reference to this object, speaks of it as "rejoicing in hope."

Charity, or love, is another of the component parts of religion mentioned by the apostle, to advance in which is to advance in happiness. God is love, and he is also the blessed God; and he is the blessed God, because he is love. It is impossible it should be otherwise. All the malevolent feelings are productive of misery to the subject of them. For this reason, Satan, whose nature is unmixed malignity, must be the subject of unmixed misery. No happiness can dwell in that bosom from which all benevolence is expelled; while no misery can be found in that breast from which all malevolence is cast out. Perfect love casts out, not only fear, but wretchedness. And is not growth in holiness equally delightful? Holiness is our spiritual health, as sin is our disease. How beautiful, and how

well worthy our attention, and adoption for ourselves, was the prayer of the apostle for Gaius! "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." Health, and especially growing health, is one of the most delightful sensations we can experience. To feel the tide of energy flow back to its forsaken channel, and the depressed frame become, amidst the beauties of nature and the breezes of heaven, more and more buoyant, the step more elastic, the appetite more keen, and the power of exertion more vigorous; is to experience in some cases almost a type of the resurrection. But even this does not equal the joy of growing in grace, of returning and increasing spiritual health.

V. It adds to the credit and redounds to the honour of religion generally. It is given out to the world, and the world knows it, that increase is one part of the Christian's duty and profession. Our phraseology and the language of Scripture are well known to those who are not pious, and who make no pretensions to be so. They hear us preach, and pray, and talk, about growth in grace; about our light shining more and more unto the perfect day; about our running the Christian race; and other matters of a like kind. They very naturally take us at our word, and knowing that all these figures of speech import progress, they look for it, and expect to see it, and are disappointed if they do not see it; and when they observe those inconsistencies which prove that we are not going forward, but even going backward, they taunt us with the sarcasm, "Where is your advancement?" "Is this your growth?" "Is it thus you improve?"

Dreadful reproach! Alas, alas, how just in appli-

cation to some, as well as dreadful! Let it be the deep solicitude of every one who has the least regard for the honour and credit of the gospel to roll this reproach away, by presenting a character in which all the beauties of holiness shall be continually coming out in bolder and more striking relief. How would it raise not only the gospel, but the church of Christ, in public estimation, if men looked up to it as a school in which pupils were ever studying how to advance in all that can make them acceptable to God, and useful to man! What reverence would it secure for the minister of the gospel, and what respect for his ministrations, if all who professed to have been converted by his preaching, were beheld engaged in an arduous struggle against all that was evil, and continually making attainments in all that was good!

VI. And is it not a powerful motive to grow in grace, to consider that our present attainments in true religion have a connexion with, and will have an influence upon, our heavenly and eternal state? There is a much closer relation between our present selves in this world, and our future selves in the next, than most persons are aware of. "What a man soweth, that shall he also reap;" both in quality and quantity. It is not possible to set out in the Christian profession with a more instructive or impressive idea than this, life is the seed-time for eternity. It is a common way to think of heaven and hell, as if they were two states where all are alike happy in the one, or alike miserable in the other, whatever may have been their attainments in holiness, or their deeds of wickedness. That all the righteous will be in heaven, and that all will be perfectly happy there, is quite true. The general sources

of heavenly felicity will be open alike to all; but this does not suppose that in many particulars, there will not be an endless variety. We know too little of the future state to specify these matters; we walk by faith. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." There are, no doubt, innumerable sources of delight, and varieties of employment, of which we can now no more form a conception than we can of the exercise and pleasure of a sixth sense. There may, and in all probability will, be gradations of social rank; diversities of post, place, and service; and higher and lower degrees of honourable distinction. For these a proportionate and diversified fitness may be required. One man may be more qualified for some high place and honourable service in the heavenly world than another: and that which constitutes the qualification for this higher place may be, not so much the great intellectual powers he possessed in our earthly state, but more eminent piety. It is not the man of large yet unsanctified understanding, that is qualified for heaven, but the man of sanctified heart. It is moral and spiritual excellence that is the meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. And whatever may be the measure of his intellectual capacity, he is the most meet for it who is most holy. If this be true, many an eminently holy peasant or artisan will be higher in glory than a less holy philosopher or scholar; and many a youthful Christian, cut off in the morning of his days, but carried away in the full blossom of distinguished piety, be found more qualified to serve God in some high place above, than an aged professor of low and small degrees of personal godliness. Is it to be conceived that God will deal out as much

commendation upon even an eminent Christian, as upon a martyr or an apostle? Or, to take a more ordinary case, upon the very feeble and too worldly-minded professor, who may be after all a sincere Christian, as upon the spiritually-minded, heavenly, self-denying, and consistent one?

But the sources of our heavenly bliss will not be all from without, but partly from within. Even on earth, "a good man is satisfied from himself." He carries, in his holy dispositions, the springs of his own felicity about with him. And so will it be in heaven. It is not only where, and with whom, we shall be, but what we shall be, that will make us happy. Eminent piety here will, in all likelihood, prepare us for a larger capacity of holiness and happiness there. The holiness and happiness of the least saint in heaven will be as perfect as that of the highest archangel, or the chief of the apostles; but the capacity for this perfection may, and must be, immeasurably larger in the one case than the other? A tea-cup may be as full to overflowing as a cistern, yet how much greater is the fulness in the one case than in the other! Here, then, is the connexion not only of a state of grace, but of the actings of grace with a state of glory. It is not only that one leads to the other; not only that one prepares for the other; but that one is proportionate to the other. It is probable that there is not one holy act, or motive, or desire, or volition of our whole lives, that has not had some bearing upon our eternal character and happiness. God deals with us as regards another world, not only according to our state, whether we are righteous or wicked, but according to our actings in that state.

ADDRESS TO THE READER.

Is your heart susceptible of the power of a motive to anything? Is there ought below or above the skies that can move you? Do you really know what a motive means? If so, surely, surely, you must feel the force of these I have now presented. Must not the stone of an unrenewed heart remain in your soul unchanged to flesh, if you are insensible to the power and attractions of these inducements? If these things fail to impress you and impel you, you would remain stationary and indifferent before a voice or a vision from heaven, or a messenger from the burning pit. If these things do not stimulate you, I should despair of the power of an angel's harp or a demon's groan. Are you, on reading these pages, at all excited to desire to advance? Say, does a fire kindle, does a glow diffuse itself throughout your soul, at the idea of what is here presented? If not, let me try again, not by new motives, but by recalling those which are here enumerated.

Does not the dread of declension, backsliding, apostasy, terrify you?

Shall not the command of God impel you?

Will not the hope of gaining a sweet and blessed evidence of sincerity, lead you to seek after progress?

Does not the experience you have already had, though it may be in a small degree, of the reward which advancement yields, induce you to go forward?

And what shall be said of the fact, that our degrees of grace will regulate our degrees of glory? Has this no motive power for your soul? What, so dull, so earthly, so insensible to the felicities, honours, and distinctions of heaven, as to feel little holy ambition to have a high place there?

CHAPTER VII.

ENCOURAGEMENTS TO PROGRESS.

THERE is, perhaps, no greater hindrance on the part of some than a desponding fear of ever getting forward in the divine life. They see so much in themselves that is imperfect; such ignorance, such corruption, and lukewarmness; so much in their situation and circumstances that is opposed to their advancement; so much of stagnancy or declension in others, that seems to render it unlikely that they will succeed better than their friends and acquaintances; so much that renders it unnecessary, as they suppose, for them ever to wish for it; that they give it up in hopeless depression. "Ah," they say, "it is indeed a desirable thing to grow in grace. Happy are those who can realize so covetable a condition of soul. I often long for it, but it is with the wishes of one who sees the object of his desire immeasurably above his reach. I sometimes sigh amidst my low attainments in knowledge, faith, joy, and holiness, and pant for better things; but I end as I began, in desponding lamentations, I seem forbidden to hope for improvement." Forbidden! By whom? Certainly not by God. Discouraged! Why? Let your despondency yield to the following considerations.

I. To those who are really anxious about this matter,

the Scripture is full of encouragement. How confident is the language of Job amidst all his sorrows! "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." Here is not only continuance, but progress. "Clean hands" denote a holy life. Among the ancients they were regarded as indicative of purity of heart. Porphyry remarks that in the heathen "mysteries," those who were initiated were accustomed to wash their hands with honey instead of water, as a pledge that they would preserve themselves from every impure and unholy thing. So that the language of Job is an assurance that a holy man should become still more holy. His very practice of righteousness tends to establish him in his way, to confirm his principles, and make that easy by habit which is enjoined as duty. Piety, like everything else, strengthens by exercise.

How beautiful is the language of the psalmist! "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing." The palm is indigenous to tropical and other warm climates. It grows to a considerable height and size, and presents a beautiful appearance. Its fruits, which are called dates, are much valued, and are eaten both fresh and preserved, and are also pressed for syrup and wine. But it is not for its fruit alone that the palm is so valuable. From the boughs, which are yearly lopped off from the lower part of the stem, are made baskets, ropes, and sacks; from the leaves mattresses, sandals, etc. It is an evergreen, and lives to an extreme old age: the wood is

durable and much used. How striking an emblem of the dignity, the perseverance, and the usefulness of a good man! He shall flourish like the palm tree. The cedar was considered by the Hebrews as the monarch of the vegetable world, on account of its magnitude and majesty, the number and extent of its boughs, and the durability of its wood, which was so remarkable that some supposed it to be incorruptible. Moreover everything about the oriental cedar has a strong balsamic odour, and a forest of cedars is so perfumed with fragrance that a walk through it is delightful. Mount Lebanon was in ancient times covered with forests of cedars, of which however there are now only few remains. Again we say to the Christian, Behold your emblem. "He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." Similar to this representation is the extraordinarily picturesque language which we find in the Book of Hosea: "I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon." These verses contain gracious promises of God's favour and blessings upon Israel's conversion. In the fifth verse, it is described by that refreshment which copious dews give to the grass in summer. If we consider the nature of the climate, and the necessity of dews in so hot a country, not only to refresh but likewise to preserve life; if we consider also the beauty of the oriental lilies, the fragrance of the cedars which grow upon Lebanon, the beauteous appearance which the surrounding olive trees

afford, the exhilarating coolness caused by the shade of such trees, and the aromatic smell exhaled by the cedars; if we add to this the reviving of the corn with all the verdure of spring, and the blushing grapes pendant from the vine; we shall then partly understand the force of the metaphors here employed by the prophet: but their full energy no one can conceive till he both feels the want and enjoys the advantage of the particulars referred to in that climate where the prophet wrote. What a glorious prophecy! How sublime! how energetic! how just! and this description is not for Israel merely after the flesh, but for the Israel of God. It may be there is a national reference, but we have lot and portion in the matter. God sets his love upon us; pours down his grace upon us; and fulfils all this to those who have faith to believe in the promise of his Spirit. It is not merely the poetic beauty of this passage that I hold up to notice (though this is surpassingly great, and is one of those gems of composition which so profusely stud the Bible, and commend it to taste as well as to piety), but the promises of grace and growth which it contains for the encouragement and consolation of all God's people to the end of time.

How full of encouragement is also the language of the prophet Isaiah, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." This beautiful passage refers primarily, though not exclusively, to the Jews in Babylon, and encouraged the pious among them to exercise confidence in God's ability and willingness to accomplish his promises, and to wait with patience for his gracious appearance on their behalf.

But it contains a general promise of continued supplies of grace and strength to all who really desire to serve the Lord with integrity and simplicity. The image of the eagle is a very fine one, and this is not the only place where it is employed. The prophet alludes to the strength of pinion and of vision possessed by this noble bird, whereby it ascends to a lofty height, untired and undazzled, soaring even above the fogs and mists of the lower regions of the air, mounting above the very clouds, undeterred by the lightning, and floating in the pure azure above. Thus shall all who wait upon the Lord rise higher and higher, upon the mighty pinions of strong devotion and with the unblinking eye of faith, into the regions of heavenly-mindedness, and shall approach nearer and nearer to God, the sun of our spiritual day.

Then the other expressions, if less figurative, are not less encouraging, "They shall run" in the heavenly race, for the crown of immortal glory "and not be weary." Their strength, instead of being exhausted, shall, contrary to what occurs in bodily effort, be increased by exertion. No length nor greatness of labour shall be too much for them. God shall pour into their souls fresh energy for every fresh effort. They shall thus be enabled to press along the mark towards the prize of their high calling in Christ Jesus. "They shall walk, and not faint." Their wayfare may be arduous; the road may be long and rugged; often up steep ascents, and down deep and rocky defiles, where every step is a labour; but they shall not lose heart or hope; they shall not swoon, halt, nor turn back, but go forwards, sustained by a power greater than their own.

But perhaps a plain didactic and unpoetic quotation from the New Testament, will, after all, have more weight with some minds than this profusion of gorgeous oriental imagery. What, then, can be more consolatory than the apostle's words to the Philippian church? "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." He will have respect to, and delight in, the work of his hands. He is honoured and glorified by the perseverance of his people in faith and holiness, and will give all the supplies of grace necessary for the work. He loves to see his children grow in all that is excellent, even as does a wise and good earthly parent, and far more readily will he contribute all that is necessary for this purpose.

II. Dwell upon the love and tenderness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me direct your attention, first of all, to that wonderfully beautiful representation where it is said, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom." You will notice who are here represented as the objects of his care, "the lambs;" which means, not those of tender age, but of recent standing in religion. Those who are young in Christian experience; and also those whose spirits are withal naturally timid, whose strength is feeble, and whose danger is great. You, you, recently brought to Christ by repentance and faith, you are the objects of Christ's special attention, care, and solicitude. You are they whom he takes up in the arms of his power, and lays on the bosom of his love. He knows your weakness, your timidity, your dangers. He directs towards you his tenderest sympathy, and will exert for you his greatest vigilance and his mightiest

power. This expression, however, not only conveys the idea of great care of the weak, but the exercise of that care with a view to their preservation and growth; it means not only that he cordially receives them, will provide for their safety, consult their comfort, and will accommodate his conduct to their wants, but will also nourish them through their infant existence, and rear them up to maturity and strength. You should dwell upon the exquisite tenderness of the passage, but not only upon this, but upon its intimation that he will assist you in your growth. The Good Shepherd does not wish or intend that his lambs should be always lambs; his aim is that they should be full-grown sheep, and he will leave nothing undone that this might be accomplished; and it is for this reason, as well as from pity and kindness, that he takes such care of them. So it is with our Lord Jesus in reference to the young convert. Let every lamb of the flock of Christ, therefore, go to him by faith and prayer, and say, "Blessed Jesus, I am come to thee a poor, weak, and trembling creature, doubtful of my own continuance, and alarmed at my numerous difficulties and enemies. I am but a lamb, and often fear I shall never be anything better, but perish as I am. But was it not in regard to such weakness that thou hast been pleased to utter these gracious and tender words? I believe what thou hast spoken, and will venture my soul upon it. I flee to thee as the helpless lamb to its shepherd when hungry to feed it, when pursued by wild beasts that he may defend it. Lord, take me in the arms of thy power, and lay me in the bosom of thy love, though I am so poor and inconsiderable a creature. I will hope in thy pastoral power and love, that I shall

not only continue but grow, and that thou wilt one day rejoice in me as one of the flock which thou hast purchased with thy own blood."

III. But perhaps you may find some encouragement even in your own experience, without looking to others. You are sometimes disheartened and cast down. You seem to make little or no progress in religion. You are no wiser, holier, or happier than you were. And you fear you never will be. You begin to be heartless and desponding. Deeply sensible of your deficiencies, you fear they will never be supplied: you feel your remaining corruptions, and have faint hopes of subduing them. You see heights above your head, which you think you will never reach. In the race you are no nearer the goal, and in the conflict gain few advantages over your foes. To be as you are is your utmost hope, and not to go back your strongest effort. For you, progress is out of the question. Again I ask, Why? Only because you think so. I have referred you to the promises of God, to the grace and intercession of Christ, to the example of others: but now let me refer you to your own history and experience. I am supposing that you have experienced the converting grace of God; that you have really and in earnest commenced the great work of salvation; in short, that you are not what you were, that old things have passed away, and all things have become new. And if this be the case, is it for you to doubt whether you can advance? Is continuance to be despaired of by him who has been enabled to begin; or advancement by him who has been enabled to continue? Have you by grace taken the mighty step, stride, bound, for it is all this, from an unconverted to a converted state, and do you doubt whether you shall go on step

by step afterwards? Have you pressed through the strait gate, and shall you not be able to press forward also in the narrow path? Is progressive sanctification more difficult, either to you or to God, than regeneration? Oh, think of all the difficulties that stood in the way when you first entered the road to glory. Recollect what you had to encounter from within and without. Have you forgotten the trembling apprehensions with which, when the decision was to be made for Christ, salvation, and eternity, you doubted if it ever would be made; the anguish with which, on a survey of all you had to encounter, you exclaimed, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Yet it was made. God's grace was sufficient for you in that tremendous crisis of your spiritual and eternal history. And now can you doubt whether the grace that converted you can carry you forward? What! planted, and not be able to thrive; born, and not be able to grow: started, and not be able to run; victorious, and not be able to conquer? Will you so much disparage the grace that has been given as to doubt its continuance, and the work it has wrought as to fear its going forward? Have you learned no more from God's past wisdom, and power, and love, than to question whether they will help you onward in that course to which they have introduced you? Why one should be ready to suppose you would be ever full of joyful expectation and exultation too, exclaiming, "To what measure of knowledge, faith, holiness, joy, and usefulness, may I not hope to reach, since I have been translated by the power of God from darkness to light, and from the kingdom of Satan unto God?" You yourself, in what God has done for you, are a proof of what he can and will do

for you if you will let him, ask him, and trust him. Cast away, then, all your desponding fears, your low expectations, your unworthy doubts; they dishonour God as well as distress yourself. You are yourself the strongest proof that you can advance, for you have advanced. "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Remember the words, and enter into the argument, of the apostle, "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

CONCLUDING ADDRESS TO THE READER.

The subject, the ineffably, infinitely, eternally, momentous subject, is now before you, compared with which all other matters, even the most valuable of them, dwindle into insignificance, shrink into nothing, and fade into darkness. I have been speaking about progress: and progress in what? Not in science, literature, wealth, power, fame. No. These are important, but what are they to religion? They relate to earth, this to heaven; they belong to time, this to eternity; their value will cease at death, the value of this will then be perpetuated for ever and ever. Every step you take in this course is a step to glory, honour, and immortality; consequences hang on each step which no mind can comprehend but that which grasps infinity and eternity. You are fearfully and wonderfully placed, for you are passing through a probation which must issue in torment or in bliss, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and which has never entered into the

imagination of man. I have laid before you the necessity of progress, in what relates to heaven and eternity, its nature, its means, its hindrances, its mistakes, its motives, and its encouragements. By the perusal of this book you have incurred a new responsibility, and are under a more solemn weight of obligation than you were before. If you should turn back in your course, you had better never have read it; or, having read it, would find it a mercy could you blot its contents from your memory. But that you cannot do. No water of oblivion can help you to cast into forgetfulness what you have read. Its coming into your hands will form a new fact in your existence of no small moment to you; for it will be a new aggravation of the sin and condemnation of backsliding, or a new means of growth in grace. It may be neglected, and for a while lost sight of, but it will rise up again and again, if you draw back, and will meet you like a frowning spectre in your retrograde path. It will follow you into eternity, to give sharpness and venom to the tooth of the never-dying worm, and fierceness to the fire that never shall be quenched. But I hope "better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak." The motives I have suggested will, I hope, prevail to urge, and the encouragements I have suggested to excite, you to advance. Everything you can desire or imagine that would be helpful is with you and for you. The attributes of the eternal God, the character and offices of Christ, the influences and operations of the Holy Spirit, the ministration of angels, the labours of Christian ministers, the religious literature of the age, the prayers of all good men, are with you, to aid and encourage you in your progress. Are these nothing? Are they little?

On the contrary, are they not much? Are they not everything? What more can you need, or can you have?

And now then let me conjure you to seek to advance in the divine life. You must not, you dare not, and I hope by the grace of God, you will not, be satisfied, to be always what you are, with no more knowledge, faith, holiness, or peace than you have now. What God commanded to be said to the children of Israel, that they should go forward, is said to you, Go forward. By all the authority, the commands, the promises of God, by all the love, power, grace, and intercession of Christ, by all the work of the Holy Spirit, so sufficient for your need, I conjure you go forward. By all the value of your immortal soul and all the blessings included in its salvation, I conjure you go forward. By all the pleasures of real religion now, and all the meetness it furnishes for eternal bliss hereafter, I conjure you go forward. By all the regard you have to the credit of the Christian profession and the welfare of other men's souls, I conjure you go forward. By all the solemnities of judgment, all the glories of heaven, all the torments of hell, all the ages of eternity, I conjure you go forward. To all these arguments and entreaties, so urgent as well as so numerous, let your judgment, heart, will, conscience, respond, "Onwards, onwards, in the path to holiness and heaven; and then onwards, onwards in happiness, through the progression of eternal ages."

Now lay down the book, and present in sincerity, faith, and fervour, the following prayer:

Almighty and most merciful Father, thou delightest not in the death of a sinner, much less in the destruction

of a believer; grant me, through Jesus Christ, the power of thy Holy Spirit, to follow the directions laid down in this book. Impress me more and more deeply with the necessity of progress in the divine life. Enlighten me to understand its true nature. Preserve me from all mistakes on this momentous subject. Bless to me the use of appropriate means for growth of grace. Enable me to avoid and put aside all hindrances to progress. Stimulate me by the application to my conscience and heart of all the motives here suggested, and cheer me by the encouragements which have here been held out to me. Of thine infinite mercy never suffer me to draw back unto perdition, but number me with those who believe to the saving of the soul. Help me, like thy holy and blessed apostle Paul, to forget the things that are behind, and press towards the mark for the prize of my high calling in Christ Jesus; and after continual increase of grace here, bring me to the eternal progression of thy saints in glory everlasting. Grant this, according to the riches of thy grace, through Christ Jesus. Amen.

THE CHRISTIAN PROFESSOR

ADDRESSED IN A SERIES OF COUNSELS AND CAUTIONS.

PREFACE.

The substance of most of the chapters of this volume was delivered in a course of sermons addressed to the church of which the Holy Ghost has made me overseer. The seasons chosen for delivering them were those Sabbath mornings on which the Lord's Supper was administered; and this time was selected, because it may be supposed, that if ever the minds of professing Christians are more than usually softened to receive the impression of practical truth, it is when the eucharistic emblems of which they are about to partake, stand uncovered before them, and as they silently point to the cross, say in the ear of faith, "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

When I look into the New Testament, and read what a Christian should be, and then look into the church of God, and see what Christians are, I am painfully affected by observing the dissimilarity; and in my jealousy for the honour of the Christian profession, have made this effort, perhaps a feeble, certainly an anxious one, to remove its blemishes, to restore its impaired beauty, and thus to raise its reputation.

What my opinion of the prevailing state of religion in the present day is, will appear still more clearly in

the following pages, and especially in the chapter devoted to the consideration of this subject. That evangelical piety is advancing and spreading over a wider surface, I have not a doubt; but what it is gaining in breadth, it is losing I am afraid in depth. Politics, and their sad accompaniments, party strife and animosity; trade carried on, as it has been, with such rage of competition, upon such a basis of credit, and to such an extent of speculation; together with the worldly spirit, to which an age of growing refinement and luxury naturally gives rise, are exceedingly adverse to a religion, of which the elements are faith, hope, love. The church of Christ, in all the sections of it, is sadly mixed up with the world as to its spirit, and many of its customs; and the great body of the faithful are far less marked in their separation from the followers of pleasure, and the worshippers of mammon, than they ought to be. "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God," is the description of a religion too rarely to be seen in this day. A few years ago an attempt was made to call the attention of the churches to the subject of a revival of piety, and some efforts, not wholly ineffectual, were made to raise the slumbering people of God, and to induce them to seek for a more copious effusion of the Holy Spirit. But the call to united and fervent prayer soon subsided amidst the busy hum of commerce, the noise of party, and the strife of tongues.

The attempt by special services to revive the spirit of piety in our churches has been of late renewed in many places, and in this town among others. So far as regards the conversion of sinners to God, and the decision of those who have been previously impressed, but were yet halting, the effects have been great and delightful:

but I am doubtful if these services have produced any considerable improvement in the spirit and conduct of professors. And it ought not to be forgotten, that the true notion of a revival of religion, at any rate religion of and in a church, is the increase of true piety in those who have already believed. This is strangely overlooked by many of our members, when contemplating, and even assisting those continuous services which have been in many places instituted, with no small success: they have rejoiced, or professed to do so, in the reality of the revival, forgetting all the while that one part of the object was the increase of their piety, and their more entire separation from the world: for they give no evidence that this has been accomplished.

Some of the great masters of painting have manifested their skill in taking portraits of themselves. Conceive of one of these noble pictures, presenting in the magic charms of drawing and colouring an almost speaking representation of its great original, by some neglect being thrown aside, and in unworthy banishment, amidst the lumber of an attic, becoming covered with dust and dirt, till its beauty is disfigured, and its transcendent excellence is disguised. Still, in despite of those defilements, there would be the likeness and workmanship of the immortal author, which, on the careful removal of the accidental adhesions, would again shine forth upon enraptured spectators, as a glorious display of human genius. Is it a profane or unworthy simile to say that a Christian, in his present state of imperfection, is something like this? He is the image of God, as delineated by God himself; but, ah! how covered with the dust and impurities of his earthly condition; still, beneath that blemished exterior, there

are the likeness and workmanship of the Great God, which, when purified from every speck and disfigurement, He will present in its restored state to the admiring gaze of the universe.

I am anxious that as much as possible of the imperfections of the Christian character should be removed now in our earthly sojourn, and that as much as may be of its great excellence should now be seen. For if we profess as Christians to have the mind of Christ, and to bear the image of God, how tremblingly anxious, how prayerfully cautious should we be, not to retain in our conduct any thing opposite to the Divine nature, lest we circulate a slander against God himself!

There is an ineffable beauty in the Christian character, as delineated by our Lord Jesus Christ in his personal ministry, and by his holy apostles; and there wants nothing but the tolerably fair copy of it in the conduct of all who bear the Christian name, to silence, if not convince, the spirit of infidelity. If the Christian church were composed only of persons whose characters were truly and exactly formed upon the model of the Sermon upon the Mount, or the apostle's description of charity, there would be no need of such defences of Christianity, as those of Lardner, Butler, Paley, and Chalmers: men would see that Christianity came from heaven, because there was nothing like it upon earth. The gospel is its own witness, but then its testimony is so often contradicted by its professed believers, as far as their conduct goes, that its evidence is got rid of on the ground of the alleged unbelief of its friends; for it is said, if they believed it in reality they would act in greater conformity to its requirements. When the church of Christ shall, by its spirit and conduct, bear

the same testimony for the gospel, as the gospel does for itself, then in the mouth of these two witnesses shall the truth of Christianity be established, beyond, I will not say, the power of refutation, for that it is already, but beyond the possibility of objection.

It is, I think, extremely probable that great injury is done to the Christian character and profession, by an abuse of the commonly admitted fact, that there is no perfection upon earth. By the aid of this humiliating concession, it is to be feared that many reconcile themselves to far more and greater imperfections, than are in any case compatible with consistency, and in some cases with sincerity. There is no perfection. But is there no command to us to seek after it? The man who does not make it the object of his desire and pursuit, who does not wish and endeavour to obtain every kind of holy excellence, in the highest possible degree, has reason to doubt the reality of his religion. A professing Christian ought to be a character of universal loveliness, in which no degree, not even the smallest, of known imperfection of any kind should be allowed to remain. It should be with him as to his holy character, as it is with persons of much neatness and nicety as to their dress, they are not only rendered uncomfortable by serious defilement, but they are uneasy till every discernible speck of dust is removed, and their whole garment present an unsullied appearance. There is such a thing as moral neatness, which, in addition to freedom from, and abhorrence of, greater sins, adds a sensitiveness to lesser ones, and a studious effort after universal purity. Perfection is our duty; perfection should be our wish, and perfection our aim; by this I mean that a Christian is not to allow himself to

practise any degree of any sin; and is to seek every possible degree of every holy virtue. How different an aspect would the Christian profession present, if all who made it, were to set up perfection of character as their aim, and according to apostolic exhortation were to "perfect holiness in the fear of God;" and to stand forth before the world, "blameless and harmless, the unrebukeable sons of God."

It was not my intention in this work, to enter into the consideration of private, experimental, or doctrinal religion, so much as into its practical parts: and to contemplate the believer rather as a professor, than a Christian; or at least, as a Christian rather in his relations to the church and to the world, than in his individual character, or in his seasons or places of retirement. To have followed precisely in the same track as Mr Jay in his lovely work, "The Christian Contemplated," would have been worse than unnecessary.

I design this little volume as a sequel to "The Church Member's Guide," and as an amplification of some topics touched upon incidentally in that work. It has been the fate of that book to obtain for its author a notoriety which he certainly did not contemplate in composing it. Advantage has been taken, by one of the tricks of controversy, of its admission of abuses, (to which, like every thing else that is good, the principles of nonconformity have been subjected in the practices of some churches,) to turn the candid exposures against the whole system of voluntary churches. Particular instances have been misrepresented as prevailing practices; and exceptional cases have been represented as normal. This is a disingenuous artifice, a miserable sophism, and a dangerous weapon, since no

system in this world of imperfection can stand before it; no, not even that set up by the apostles themselves; for the same kind of evils, which I have acknowledged are to be found amongst us, are to be traced in all the primitive churches planted and superintended by inspired men. Perhaps the same means will be employed in reference to this volume. If so, those who use them are quite welcome to them. To guard, however, as much as possible, against misconception or misrepresentation, I would affirm once for all, that I think professors of all denominations are much below their privileges, their principles, and their obligations; and that I have not addressed the contents of these chapters to my own flock, or my own section of the church, because I think they are behind others in piety, but because I wish them to be above and beyond the average religion of the day.

Edgbaston, 1836.

CHAPTER I.

THE IMPORT OF PROFESSING TO BE A CHRISTIAN.

A PROFESSION of Christianity is the most solemn engagement on earth, and he that makes it, is either one of the best, or on some accounts, one of the worst, members of society. Much then does it become all who call themselves by the name of Christ, to enquire with the deepest anxiety, whether they are sufficiently aware of the nature and obligations of the act which they performed, when by entering into fellowship with the church of God, they publicly said, "I am a Christian." Being apprehensive that there is much ignorance on the subject, and much neglect even where there is not ignorance, I most earnestly entreat the serious and prayerful attention of all professors who may read these pages, to what may now be stated, as to a matter personally and individually applicable to themselves.

To "profess" means "to declare publicly and solemnly something that we believe, or that we intend to do;" so that a "profession" of Christianity signifies a public, solemn, and emphatic declaration that we believe the truths and submit to the obligations of Christianity. The authors of our English version of the Scriptures have given two renderings of the one word in the original language, sometimes translating it profession, and

sometimes confession. In this they have conformed to a distinction which modern use has established, according to which profession means, the declaration of our religious faith in the ordinary and tranquil circumstances of the Christian Church, without any reference to persecution; while confession means the avowal of our belief, in times of danger, and before persecuting rulers. A confessor is synonymous with a martyr: while a professor is simply a person publicly declaring himself a christian. Still, however, it must be admitted that as there is no difference of term in the original Scriptures, so there is none in reality; for he who makes a profession of religion, declares, if he be sincere, his intention, if required to do so, to seal his testimony with his blood.

It may not be amiss to present the reader with some of those passages of holy writ in which the two words are employed by the English translators. Speaking to Timothy, the apostle Paul tells him that he had "professed a good profession before many witnesses." This refers to the declaration of his faith before the church: while in the next verse, Christ is said to have witnessed or testified a good confession before Pontius Pilate. Jesus Christ is called "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession," and it is said, "Seeing we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." The passages in which the other term is used are still more numerous: only a few of them need be given. "Whosoever," says Christ, "shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my father which is in heaven." "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart

man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God."

I. Let us now consider, what the Christian profession includes.

It is a public, solemn, and emphatic declaration to this effect: "I am a Christian; I wish to be considered one; and I mean to live as one." Or to use the comprehensive language of Christ, it is confessing him before men. It is important to remark that whatever be its import, it has special and explicit reference to Christ: it is not a declaration of belief, merely in the existence attributes and purposes of God, as the Creator Preserver and Governor of the universe; an avowal of theism, as opposed to idolatry: no, it is a profession of Christ: "Whosoever," said our Lord, "shall confess me, I will confess him:" "Whosoever," repeats the apostle, "shall confess that he is raised from the dead, shall be saved: to him every tongue shall confess." This is both instructive and impressive, and contains a strong presumptive proof of his true and proper divinity. The Christian church is a collection of witnesses for Christ: a public, embodied, testimony to Christ: a spiritual temple, bearing on its lofty front the inscription "To the glory of Christ." Every thing under the new covenant refers to him: the Sabbath is to honour him, it is the Lord's day; the eucharist is to commemorate him; the christian profession is to testify of him: so that if Christ be not divine, we are under a dispensation which seems to shut God out. Religious worship and obligations are diverted from God, and directed to a creature. There was nothing like this under the old covenant.

Moses was but a servant of the house under that economy, and is not held up as receiving the honour of a proprietor: but Christ is a Son over his own house; and this is our profession, that we are Christ's.

But what is it concerning Christ that we declare when we make a profession of him?

We profess that we believe in him and receive him as the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world, divinely appointed by the Father as the Word who was in the beginning with God, and was God, to be the great Prophet by whom is made known to man the nature of Jehovah, and his purpose of redeeming mercy towards our fallen race; and that with docility and meekness we receive all his doctrines, whether declared by his own personal ministry on earth, or by his inspired apostles, however mysterious their nature, or humbling their tendency.

We profess that we are convinced of sin as transgressors of the law of God, that we repent of our manifold and aggravated transgressions, and that hating and forsaking iniquity, we mean to live a righteous and holy life.

We profess that as sinners lost and condemned, not only by the fall of Adam, but by our own actual transgressions, we truly believe in Christ, and thankfully receive him as the divinely appointed Priest and Sacrifice for sin, and that we rest exclusively upon the infinite merit of his obedience unto death for the justification of our persons, for all the blessings of grace here, and glory hereafter; and that through faith in him we have received a present, and do really hope for an eternal, salvation.

We profess that we cordially receive Christ, and

cheerfully submit to him as our King, Lawgiver, and Judge, who has promulgated his laws in the New Testament, and who requires an unhesitating, unreserved, willing, affectionate, and uninterrupted submission to his authority, however self-denying that submission may be, as regards our ease, wealth, and worldly esteem. We acknowledge his right to rule over our bodies, with all their senses, organs, members, and appetites; and our souls with all their varied and noble faculties. We declare that the rigid, refined, severe morality of the sermon on the Mount, and the law of charity laid down in the epistle to the Corinthians, are and shall be the rule of our conduct: and that as Christ has enjoined it, we will, by God's help, follow whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. And since he has instituted various ordinances of religion for his own glory, and our benefit, such as the Sabbath, the Sacraments, and other public ordinances, we declare that we will punctually, seriously, and constantly observe them.

We profess that we receive Christ as our pattern and example, and that we are determined, as God shall assist us, to conform ourselves to him, in our spirit, temper and conduct. That we will strive to come, as near as our circumstances will allow, to him, who was so dead to this world, that he renounced wealth, rank, ease, fame; so holy that he could appeal to the most malignant of his foes for the sinless purity of his conduct; so submissive to the divine will, that he drank the deepest, fullest, bitterest cup of human woe, without a murmur; so meek and lowly, as to bear the greatest injuries and insults with unruffled serenity and placability; so full of benevolence, as to pray for his foes, to

die for them, and save them. Yes: we say to the world, "Look at Jesus of Nazareth in his holy and beneficent career, and in his ignominious and agonising death, see him whose whole character was a compound of purity and love, there is my model."

We profess to receive his cause and kingdom in the world, as our own; to identify ourselves with true religion, and to unite our hearts with the church as the most important community on earth; we avow that whatever relative and temporal importance may attach to the cause of literature, science, liberty, or commerce, yet the salvation of immortal souls is the most momentous interest in the universe, and that our time, influence, talents, and property, are at Christ's command, to promote it as our supreme object.

We profess that we have received the Lord Jesus as the scope and end of our very existence; that we have ceased to live for wealth, ease, or reputation, as the supreme object of pursuit; that for us to live is Christ; and that so that he is honoured by us, it is of secondary consequence in what situation or circumstances he may place us for this purpose.

We profess to be looking for Christ's universal spiritual reign and second coming to manifest himself to his church and to judge the world, as the supreme object of our joyful hope; and that compared with this, all the greatest changes and most glorious revolutions which are expected on earth, are to us but insignificant and uninteresting events.

We profess that we hope to be accepted by Christ in the day of judgment; expect to be received into his heavenly kingdom, where we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is, and dwell for ever with the Lord;

and that till then, we are living by faith on earth, sending our affections after him to glory, (as an affectionate wife left in a strange land, looks forward with eager anticipation to the time of meeting her husband again;) and that by the prospect and faith of that glory to be revealed, we have overcome the love of life and fear of death.

We profess that for the performance of duties so solemn, so weighty, so important, so difficult, we have no ability of our own; that all our dependence and hope are founded on the supply of the Spirit of Christ Jesus; and that conscious of many defects, we are humble before God and man, and constantly beseech the exercise of God's forbearing and forgiving mercy.

Such is the christian profession. What height, what length, what depth, what breadth! Well may we ask, who dare take it up; or, who taking it up, can sustain it?

II. I now consider how this profession is made.

What I have before stated, contains the matter of our profession, but in what manner is it to be put forth? What is the precise formal act in which it consists? To whom, and in what way is the declaration of our faith to be delivered? If we go back to the promulgation of Christianity, we find our Lord delivering the following commission to his disciples, "Go ye and teach, (or, "make disciples of," as the word signifies,) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." In compliance with this charge, the apostles required all who believed in Christ, to be baptized, to join themselves to the church, to receive the Lord's Supper, and to observe the other ordinances of the Christian religion:

and then, upon this profession of their belief in Jesus, they were received into the fellowship of the faithful. This, their declaration of faith, accompanied as it was by baptism, and their reception into the church, was their profession. Till they did this, however frequently they might have attended the Christian assemblies, however deeply they might have been convinced of the truth of the gospel, however freely they might have communicated their sentiments to any members of the church privately, they made no confession, and were not ranked among the professors of Christianity.

In the conventional sense which the term has acquired in congregational churches, it means much the same thing, and signifies a person declaring to the pastor and the church with whom he desires to be associated in visible communion, his repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ: and his being received into the church on the ground of that declaration, after it has been examined and found to be conformable to the mind of God, and, so far as appears, sincerely made. It is his public testimony, to those whom God has authorized to receive it, to the character and work of Christ, and of the state of his own mind towards him. Publicity, in the scriptural manner, is essential in all cases; there may be religion, sincere, fervent religion, but till we have publicly and formally, before the pastor or church, or both, declared ourselves believers, there is no profession. With us, profession means the act of joining ourselves with the people of God, upon an avowal of our sentiments, accompanied by a declaration that we believe we are justified by faith, truly regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and intend to lead a holy life.

It is professing this I say publicly: before the par-

ticular church with which we enter into fellowship; and before that as the representative of the whole catholic church. We say to the church, "I take your God to be my God; your Saviour to be my Saviour; your people, to be my people; your ordinances, to be my ordinances. I partake with you of the common salvation, and like precious faith. I receive you as christians, and beg in the name of our common Lord, to be received as such by you."

It is a profession before the world. It is saying, "Hear, ye children of men, ye that are disobeying God, and neglecting Christ. I was one of you, but I am no longer one of you: I can no longer live as you do, and as I once did. I am in Christ a new creature, old things are passed away, and all things are become new. I come out and am separate from the world, and give myself up to Christ and his church, to follow him in all things, as my Saviour, Ruler, and Pattern; and I consent you should be judges how far I fulfil my solemn obligations." And be it recollected, that this declaration is made not only before the world, but in the world, in the shop, in the market, in the exchange. It is a profession, not only for Sabbath days, but for all days; not only for the place of religious convocation, but for the places of secular resort. "Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates, in the city she uttereth her voice:" and her children must do the same, honouring their mother by imitating her. To the man who invites or tempts them to an unkind, untrue, unjust, dishonest, or malicious word or action, or who suspects them to be capable of one,

they should reply, "I profess Christ, and can I thus deny or betray him?"

It is a profession before angels, who as the ministering spirits that minister to the heirs of salvation, must be the spectators of their conduct; before devils, who tremble as they hear those solemn words, "I am a christian," drop from their lips, and who from that moment have all their enmity and subtilty roused and employed to make them if possible faithless to their calling; yea, it is a profession before God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus Christ bends from his throne to hear them utter the announcement, "I am a christian," and from thenceforwards ever looks from his seat of glory to see how they fulfil the obligations which they have thus publicly, solemnly, and voluntarily taken upon themselves. He never loses sight of them for a moment, but is ever watching to see how they sustain his name; his name which they have confessed before men.

What a profession, and how publicly made! By how many spectators you are surrounded and watched! From the hour you call yourself a disciple of Christ, the church with a tender interest, the world with malignant curiosity, angels with kind solicitude, devils with rooted enmity, God with a jealous eye, and Christ with tender sympathy, mark every step of your progress; for "ye are come to Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant."

This view of the nature and obligation of the christian profession, is confirmed and forcibly stated in the following address to persons on their joining the church, taken from a Manual used in one of the Presbyterian churches in America.

EXPLANATION.

"You have now presented yourselves in this public manner before God, to take his covenant upon you, to confess Jesus Christ before men, to testify your faith, and hope, and joy in his religion, practically to condemn your former selves, together with the 'whole world' as 'lying in wickedness,' unreservedly to dedicate yourselves to the service of your Creator, and definitely to incorporate yourselves with his visible people. You are about to profess supreme love to God, sincere contrition for all your sins of heart and life, and faith unfeigned in the Lord Jesus Christ. You are about publicly to ratify a solemn compact to receive 'the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost,' as revealed in the Scriptures, in all the agencies they execute for the government of the world, and in all the offices they sustain for the salvation of the church; and to 'walk henceforth' 'in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless.'

ENCOURAGEMENT.

"We trust you have fully considered the purport of these several professions and engagements. The transaction before you is solemn in its nature, and will be followed with eternal consequences. God and holy angels, as well as this church, these spectators, and your own consciences, your pastor and these elders, are witnesses. Your vows will be recorded in heaven; they will be publicly exhibited on your trial at the last day. Nevertheless, with these reflections you need not be overwhelmed. In the precious name of Jesus Christ, which is as 'ointment poured forth,' you may 'boldly enter into the holiest, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh:' and having a High Priest over the House of God, you may draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having your hearts 'sprinkled with his atoning blood,' 'from an evil conscience, and your bodies washed with pure water,' by baptism, according to his appointment. For 'this is he that came by water and blood,' even Jesus Christ; 'not by water only, but by water and blood: and it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.' God is indeed great in majesty, infinite in power, 'glorious in holiness,' inflexible in justice, and

'fearful,' even in 'praises:' still, he is abundantly 'merciful and gracious:' and as such, manifests himself by graciously condescending, through Jesus Christ, to enter into covenant with sinners. You may venture, then, in the filial spirit, irreversibly thus to commit yourselves, and trust to his promised and inviolable 'faithfulness,' for strength to discharge your obligations, and perform your engagements.

DEDICATION.

"And now, in the presence of God, angels, and men, you do solemnly avouch the Lord Jehovah to be your God and Portion, the Object of your supreme love and delight; and the Lord Jesus Christ to be your Saviour from sin and death: your Prophet to instruct you, your Priest to atone and intercede for you, and your King to rule, protect, and enrich you; and the Holy Ghost to be your Illuminator, Sanctifier, Comforter, and Guide; looking to him for delight, grace, and peace; unto this Triune God, this wonderful 'Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,' into which we are baptized, you do now, without reserve, give yourselves away, in a covenant never to be revoked, to be his willing servants for ever, to observe all his commandments and all his ordinances, in the sanctuary, in the family, and in the closet. You do also bind yourselves by covenant to this church, to watch over us in the Lord, to seek our purity, peace, and edification, and conscientiously to submit to the government and discipline of Christ as here administered; counting it a privilege and a favour, not a privation and a grievance, to be subjected in the Lord, to that authority which himself hath established in his church, and which he hath made it not more the duty of his officers to exercise, than of his members to obey.

"All this, in the Divine strength, you do severally profess and engage.

ACCEPTATION.

"In consequence of these your professions and engagements, we do affectionately open our arms to receive you as members of this church, and in the name of Christ, declare you entitled to all its visible privileges. We welcome you, as brethren in Christ, to his fellowship with us in the labours and the blessings, and the toils and the honours, the crosses and the crowns, the trials and the rewards of the gospel of our risen Redeemer: and on our part, engage, in his strength, to watch over you, to seek your edification, and to aid your progress through this wilderness to the fields of real pleasure beyond it. Should you have occasion, in providence, to remove from us, to live within the bounds or in the neighbourhood of another church, we

should hold it our duty to give, as it will be yours to seek, a recommendation from us, which will place you under the watch and care of that portion of the family of Christ: for, hereafter, you can never withdraw from the pale of the church, or live in the neglect of sealing ordinances, without a breach of covenant.

"And now, beloved in the Lord, let it be impressed on your minds that you have entered into a solemn condition, from which you can never escape. Wherever you may be, and however you may act, these vows will remain upon you through life. They will follow you to the bar of God, and in whatever world you may be fixed, they will abide upon you to eternity. You can never again be as you have been. You have unalterably committed yourselves, and henceforth you must be the servants of God! Hereafter the eyes of the world will be upon you, and as you demean yourselves, so will religion be honoured or disgraced. Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ, and you will be a credit and comfort to us: but if it be otherwise, you will be to us a grief of heart, a stumbling-block, and a vexation: and if there be a woe pronounced upon him who offends one of Christ's little ones, woe, woe, to the person who offends a whole church! But, dearly beloved, we hope better things of you, and things which accompany salvation, though we thus speak. May the Lord strengthen you, and give you a comfortable passage through this transitory life, and after its warfare shall be accomplished, bring us altogether into that blessed church, where our communion shall be for ever perfect, and our joy for ever full. Grace be with you. Amen."

Christians, ye who make this profession, and make it thus, does not the subject require and demand your very serious consideration, and your devout and prayerful examination, whether you are sincere and consistent? Do you understand what is included in that all-comprehensive word, "A christian;" in that public declaration, "I am a christian?" Have you studied your name, analysed your profession? Are you aware what the world, the church, and angels expect from you, and what God and Christ demand of you? Or have you thrust yourself into the church, rushed to the Lord's table, and thoughtlessly assumed the christian

name in ignorance? Do you understand your profession, and does the world believe that you are sincere in it? While you are telling them that you are Christ's, is your conduct such that they are compelled to admit the truth of it? Do they see a copy of your profession written out in living characters upon all your conduct? Perhaps the view that has been given of the christian profession may startle some of you and make you tremble: I wish it may; for there is need of trembling with some. Should you endeavour to protect yourself against these searching inquiries by affirming that I have represented the subject in too alarming an aspect, and have made the Christian profession too comprehensive and too strict, I ask for proof. My appeal is to your Bible. I cite but one passage, "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end, Christ both died and rose and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living." This is what is required in every professor of religion, to live and die for Christ; to have no separate existence from the dominion of Christ, so as to be enabled to say with the apostle, "For me to live is Christ." Is this our profession, or is it not? If it be, are we aware of it, or are we ignorant of it; too comprehensive and too strict it may be for some, and if so they are none of Christ's; they had better abandon a name which they do but dishonour, and a profession which they only contradict: but better still is it that by studying it afresh, they should strive by divine grace to come up to the high and holy standard.

What cause for deep humiliation does this subject

afford to the most eminent and consistent professors! Even the best of them must take shame and confusion of face to themselves, that they have lived so far beneath their own public declaration. Well is it that there is mercy for saints, as well as sinners; for even the most distinguished of them must exclaim, "God be merciful to me a professor." O how little have we by ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, years, honoured Christ, glorified God, recommended religion, strengthened the church, and blessed the world! Wherefore be ye clothed with humility.

Shall we not from this time begin afresh? Let us read over this imperfect outline of our profession, this sketch of our covenant with the Lord, this bond of surrender to him, this record of our vows; and with a deliberate purpose, and a believing dependence on the promised help of the Spirit of God, let us consecrate ourselves afresh to the glory of Christ, according to the tenor of our christian profession.

CHAPTER II.

THE DESIGN AND DUTY OF PROFESSION.

It is every man's duty to confess Christ. But there is a previous duty to be performed, and that is to receive him. We should first be christians and then declare ourselves such; and anxious, most anxious, yea tremblingly anxious, should we be, not to advance to the second position, till we have taken up the first. Every thing is, or should be, subsequent to this. The business immediately to be done by every fallen creature, is to repent, believe the gospel, and be at peace with God. He should without any delay have the faith of God's elect, and as soon as he has it, he must avow it. We must not, either through timidity, or from any prudential considerations, wish to keep our religion a secret, or covet to go by a secluded and unobserved path to heaven. It is not enough for us to commend ourselves to God as sincere, but we must acknowledge our faith "before men." This is most clearly and most solemnly taught us by our Lord: "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father who is in heaven; but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." "Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful

generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels." "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart, that is the word of faith which we preach, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." I have already described what this confession means, and shewn that it is substantially the same as profession: and it only remained to bring forward these solemn passages in proof that it is our duty to make it. The bare reading of them is enough to show that this is binding upon our conscience, by all the weight of divine authority. Christ forbids not only open enmity, but secret love: not only public rebellion, but concealed allegiance. He has commanded a profession, and made it one of the laws of his kingdom, under the peril of being disowned by him: and he who refuses to comply with this law, seems to put his salvation in jeopardy.

The design and uses of this profession are manifest, and should be constantly kept in view. I need scarcely premise that it is not to make us Christians, for it supposes that we are such already. It is a fearful, though it is to be apprehended, not an uncommon thing, for persons to substitute the profession for the possession, and to consider that they become Christians, by saying publicly they are such.

The ends of profession are various: some of them refer to Christ. It is confessing Christ, and intended,

as I have already shewn, to honour him by a public declaration that we have believed his divine mission, as the Son of God and Saviour of the world; the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King of his church; that we worship him as our God, rely upon him as our Saviour, and serve him as our master. This is, of course, to glorify him, it is to fulfil, as far as we are concerned, the prediction that to him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess. Yes, every professor adds another voice to swell the chorus of praise that is rising to the honour of Jesus: adds another witness to the multitude that speak of him to the world, and roll his name round the globe: adds another trophy to the spoils which are accumulating in the church to celebrate his victory over sin and Satan. It is a sweet and cheering reflection to the professor, that his very connexion with the church, if it be maintained with consistency, is to the honour of Him who hath bought him with his blood.

But there are designs relating to ourselves. It rescues us from the reproach, and wipes off the stigma, of being Christ's enemies, and puts upon us the honour of being accounted his friends. The great multitude of mankind lie under the disgrace of being the foes of Jesus; and this in appearance, is the case with all who have not separated themselves from their number by profession. There may be real christians among them, who in other parts of their conduct are sufficiently distinguished from them, but they are like Peter in the hall of the High Priest, among the foes of Christ. They are in the enemy's camp, though they do not wear his colour and costume. When we join the church, we say publicly, "Account me no longer an enemy of Christ. I believe

in him, adore him, love him, and serve him." Who would not be eager to say this? Who would have a shadow of a shade of suspicion attaching to him of being Christ's enemy? Who does not glory in the thought of saying to those who despise and reject him, "I am not one of you, I cannot treat the Saviour as you do?"

Profession gives us a right and title to all the privileges and comforts of communion with his church. It is our saying to his disciples, "I come into the house in the Master's name, and take a seat at his table, invited and accepted by him. He has given me a share in all the immunities of his family." It is, therefore, our act of association with his people, our title of admission to the fellowship of the faithful. Till we profess, they have no warrant to receive us; and when we do, they have no right to reject us. We have, then, a claim upon their confidence, their sympathy, their affection, and their prayers; and they upon ours. How cheering the idea, that we have thus acquired an interest in the hearts of the brethren, the communion of the church, and the supplications of those who have power with God to prevail. The solemn festivities of the sacramental table, the consultations and decisions of the church meetings, the maintenance of the comely order of Christ's house, all belong to us now by grant and covenant.

Nor is comfort the only benefit that results to us by profession, but holiness, help, and safety. Trees grow best in plantations and forests; so do christians in church-fellowship. Christ has gathered his people into churches, that they may enjoy the benefits of reciprocal watchfulness, care, help, and love. Christians do, or should, rally round one another, "to warn them that

are unruly, to comfort the feeble-minded, to support the weak." They are commanded to exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Profession draws many friendly eyes upon us, and many affectionate arms around and underneath us.

It is a bond upon our constancy. Publicity has a tendency to make us watchful and cautious. We have now taken up a character; we have placed ourselves on high; we have invited notice; we have said before many spectators,

> "Here in thy courts I leave my vow,
> And thy rich grace record;
> Witness ye saints who hear me now
> If I forsake the Lord."

It might perhaps be thought that if a consciousness that the eye of God is upon us, is not enough to preserve us, the additional recollection that we are under the surveillance of our fellow-creatures will not increase our vigilance and circumspection. But this is contrary to fact. In certain states of mind we are wrought upon more by what we see, than by what we believe; the eye of faith may be sometimes too dim to see Him that is invisible, and then it is well that the eye of sense can see those that are visible.

Pastoral oversight is another benefit which profession brings to us, and is designed to bring. Is it no privilege, or even a small one, to have the wise counsels, the affectionate reproofs, the wakeful care, the tender sympathy, the fervent prayers, of a minister of God?

Profession has also a purpose that relates to the church. It gives visibility to this holy community. The church is God's witness in the world, and every one who joins it strengthens its testimony. It speaks

by its embodied piety, and by its united voice, for Christ. Every one who enters its communion adds something to its strength and its stability. But for profession, it would cease to appear as a church. Nor does each professor only add to the visibility, and do something for the permanency of the church, but also for its utility. It is God's instrument for illuminating and converting the world: the golden candlestick containing the lamp of truth: the magazine of ways and means for evangelizing the nations of the earth: and every one who becomes a member of it, carries to it an addition of zeal and piety to render it more and more efficient.

Profession is for the world. This I have already partly shown in what I have just considered, but it may be more extensively dwelt upon. "Ye are the salt of the earth, ye are the light of the world," said Christ to his disciples. The church is the pillar and ground of truth, intended to hold up, to send round, to hand down, the truth: to show what truth is, what faith is, what holiness is: to exhibit the text, and a living comment upon it too: to send out life-giving voices, attended by life-giving actions; to speak for God to, and act for God upon, the dark and inert mass around. The true church of Christ is evidently designed not only to receive the truth by faith, for its own sake, but to reflect it, by profession, for the world's sake. It seems to bear much the same relation to the Word of God, that the moon does to the sun; and to perform somewhat the same functions in the spiritual economy, which that satellite does in the planetary system. It is not the original source of light, for that is the Bible;

but it is the recipient and depository of that light, which it receives for its own benefit, and reflects for the benefit of a benighted world. The church revolves in the attraction of this moral orb, and exhibits to those who would not otherwise receive them, its glorious beams. Hence, by the Lord's Supper, which is strictly and exclusively a social ordinance, the church is said to "show forth" the death of Christ till his second coming. The word signifies to "publish openly and effectually," "to declare in a joyful and emphatic manner." To whom is this declaration to be made? Not to the church, for they are to make it. Not to the angels or spirits made perfect, for they do not need it; but to the careless, impenitent, and unbelieving world. The death of Christ, as a sacrifice for sin, is the great truth of Christianity: it is not so much a doctrine of Scripture, as the Scripture itself; it is in fact, the new covenant: and the church gathered round the sacramental table, and jointly partaking of the elements of bread and wine in believing remembrance of the atoning death of the Lord Jesus, is in that act, as well as by its well known publicly declared sentiments, a witness for Christ and a preacher of him to the world. He is thus evidently set forth crucified for sinners, who are thereby invited to behold him as the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world. Every time the church is gathered together, the "Bride," the Lamb's wife, lifts up her entreating voice, on behalf of her divine Lord, and says to those who are despising and rejecting him, "Come to Christ for salvation." Every professor, therefore, who joins himself to the church, both by his declaration of faith and his approaches to

the table of the Lord, sends forth the invitation to unbelievers, "Come to Jesus and be saved."*

Every consistent professor, then, is a light shining in a dark place, shining not for himself, but for others; shining to guide men to Christ, to the church, and to heaven: a friendly lamp in the world's dark course, to assist them in finding their way to everlasting life. Can any thing be mentioned more solemnly admonitory as to the duties of professors or their responsibility! How clearly should the light of truth shine forth in an enlarged, correct, and scriptural acquaintance with the doctrines of grace! How clearly should the light of holiness shine forth in all holy conversation and godliness! How clearly should the light of love shine forth in brotherly kindness and charity! And how clearly should the light of happiness shine forth in the peace that passes understanding, and the joy unspeakable and full of glory! O, let it not be forgotten that a professor is designed to be a light for the world; and then it may be asked again, "What manner of men ought we to be?"

Have we considered these matters deliberately and with an intelligent mind? Have we asked ourselves the solemn question, "For what purpose have I come out of the world into the church; and have I answered, and am I answering that purpose? Am I a living martyr and faithful witness for Christ; making him known and causing him to be loved? Am I a finger-post to the cross, a way-mark to heaven? Do I bear the image of Christ,

* Does not this expression of the apostle's plainly prove that the Lord's Supper ought to be observed publicly before the whole congregation? How else can we by that act "show forth" the death of Christ?

and show the world for what purpose he came into the world, and died upon Calvary? Am I a useful addition to the church, increasing not only its bulk, but its strength, its beauty, its health; giving it visibility, not only as an ecclesiastical corporation of nominal christians, but as the recipient of heavenly communications, the vestibule of the celestial temple, yea the tabernacle of God with man, and having the glory of Jehovah? Have I added any thing to its spiritual excellence, and its moral power? Or have I been a mere appendage, a lifeless adjunct, a useless addition, and more of an incumbrance than a help to its influence? As regards myself, what benefit have I derived from my profession? I have obtained a public right to church privileges, have taken my seat at the table of the Lord, and appropriated to myself a share of the blessings of fellowship, and the prayers of the brethren. How far am I the holier and happier for these things? Have I grown in grace, and found the communion of saints to aid me in the preparation for the fellowship of the blessed in heaven? Have I found that my profession has indeed proved a bond upon my constancy, and made me watchful, circumspect, and cautious? Has it separated me from the world, and kept me separate in association, spirit, and conduct? I have had the watchful eye of my pastor upon me, and have received his admonitions publicly and privately; am I the better for this, and a comfort to his heart? As respects the world, what good has it derived from me? Has the end of my profession been accomplished in reference to the unconverted part of mankind? What have they seen in me calculated to subdue their prejudice against religion, and to conciliate their affection to it? Have I shewn them the light

of truth, the beauty of holiness, and the power of love? Like a lesser magnet, touched by the mighty load-stone of Mount Calvary, have I drawn men to Christ? Are there any, who in looking to me, will say, "There is the instrument of my conversion?"

Such interrogatories as these ought to be pressed home by every professor on his conscience at the seasons, and they should frequently occur, of his solemn examination into the state of his soul.

It may be, that some will read these pages who have not yet publicly professed faith in Christ, although they have reason to hope that they possess it? But why not profess it? Have you considered our Lord's demand, Mark viii, 37, or the apostle's declaration, Rom. x, 8? Sit down and study those passages, ponder them well, apply them to your own case; and then say if you will any longer believe secretly, when required to profess publicly? "I am startled," you say, "since profession comprehends so much." True, it does so, but it is demanded of you: yes, both the possession and the profession. "I am afraid I shall disgrace my profession if I make it as many have already done." True, they have: millions of souls have been helped on to perdition by the misconduct of nominal christians: and you ought to tremble at the idea of adding to the number; but God's grace is sufficient for you. The way of duty is the way of safety, and none are so likely to be kept from falling, as those who enter on their course with a holy fear of falling. Besides, are you not dishonouring God by making no profession, and thus guilty of the inconsistency of actually doing wrong lest you should do it? "But I can go to heaven without making a profession."

How do you know that? Perhaps not. It may be necessary for you, although some others may have reached the heavenly shore without it. It is not for us to say of any obvious duty, "I can go to heaven without it." Not that I mean to insinuate justification is by works; or that absolute perfection is essential to salvation: but what I mean is this, God requires obedience in all cases of known duty, and where we make exceptions, he may be so displeased as to give us up to ourselves, and leave us to turn again to the world. "But if I make a profession, I shall displease my friends." "Whoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the Gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore, shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, and with his holy angels." This is unbending, awful language. What is the favour or displeasure of friends to this? Is there aught in the fear or frown of any mortal under heaven, that should deter us from our duty in the view of such a peril as this? "But my parents or my husband do not make a profession, nor are they fit for it, and they would not like me to join the church without them, and I should scarcely like it myself." If they will not go to heaven, should that induce you to reject any of the means that help you thither? If they will not honour

Christ, should that hinder you from doing it? Will you disobey the Saviour out of compliment to any earthly friend whatever? It is your duty, your solemn duty, and is it better to please men or God? Perhaps your decision in this matter may be blessed to them. If not, you are to do what is right without considering consequences.

Abandon excuses and objections then, and confess with the mouth, even as God has given you grace to believe with the heart.

CHAPTER III.

THE DANGER OF SELF-DECEPTION.

The professors of Christianity may be divided into three classes, the sincere, the hypocritical, and the self-deceived. Of the second class there are very few. I have rarely met with any. It is not often that any one attains to such a pitch of audacious and disgusting wickedness, as to make, for a sinister purpose, a profession, which at the time he knows to be false. But while there are few that are intentionally deceiving others, there are very many who are unconsciously deceiving themselves. Alarming consideration! To be self-deceived in a matter of such tremendous importance as the salvation of the immortal soul! To suppose that we are justified before God, while we are under the condemnation of his righteous law: that we are truly regenerated, while we are still in an unconverted state: that we are the children of God, while we are the children of the devil; and that we are travelling to heaven, while each day, as it passes, leaves us nearer to the bottomless pit! The very possibility of such a case should rouse our lukewarm souls, excite all our fears, and put us upon the most cautious and diligent examination.

PROFESSION IS NOT POSSESSION.

This common, yea hacknied, yet true and impressive

sentiment is thus put out by itself, in bold and prominent relief, that it may attract the reader's attention, and come upon his heart and conscience with all possible emphasis. A church member is not necessarily a real Christian; and outward communion with the members is no certain proof of vital union with the Divine Head. It is to be feared that fatal mistakes are made by many on this momentous subject. Among those who pay little or no attention to religion, it is very commonly supposed, that dying is somehow or other to fit them for heaven; that some mysterious change is to pass upon them then, by which they shall be meetened for the kingdom of glory; as if death were a converting ordinance, instead of a mere physical change; a sacrament of grace, instead of a mere dissolution of our compound nature. Others attach the same mistaken notion to the act of uniting with a Christian church, making a profession of religion, and receiving the Lord's Supper, as if that were in some way or other to effect a change in them, and by a process of which they can form no definite idea, to make them true Christians. But there are others who, better taught, attach no such incorrect opinions to church fellowship; who admit the necessity of faith and regeneration, as pre-requisites to communion, but who after all deceive themselves in the supposition that they possess those qualifications.

I. Such self-deception is not only possible, but frequent. This is evident from the many warnings against it, contained in the apostolic writings. "Be not deceived," is an admonition thrice repeated by Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians. How impressive is his language to the Galatians, "If any man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he

deceiveth himself!" The apostle James follows up the subject; "Do not err, my beloved brethren. Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." What solemn admonitions are in other places given on the work of self-scrutiny! "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates." "Let every man prove his own work." But what can equal the force and impressiveness of the apostle's language and caution in reference to himself? "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means after I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." If such a man, the greatest, the holiest, the most distinguished member, minister, and apostle of the Christian church, found it necessary to exercise such caution, what must be the need of it on our part?

The danger of self-deception is also apparent from the alarming declarations of Christ. In the parable of the sower, he divides the hearers of the word into four classes, of which one only is composed of sincere believers, although two at least out of the other three, are represented as receiving the word and professing it for a while. How solemn and awakening are his words in the sermon upon the mount! "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father, who is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name have done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that

work iniquity." These persons will be not only professors, but of high standing in the church; they will be confident of their safety, yet they will be lost; and there will be many of them!

Dwell upon the facts recorded in the New Testament; Judas, though he ended as a dissembling hypocrite, began, in all probability, as a self-deceived professor. One apostle out of twelve a false professor! What multitudes at one time followed Christ, and in some sort believed on him, and among them many rulers of the Jews! Yet so great was the number that afterwards abandoned their profession, that our Lord put this question to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" implying that the rest had nearly all left him. Peter speaks of some "who, after they had known the way of righteousness, had turned from the holy commandments delivered unto them." And John, in describing the case of some in his time, says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us." Let any one read attentively the addresses to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor, contained in the second and third chapters of the Apocalypse, and observe the description of those communities given by one who could not err; and some of them will be found to have contained a great portion of merely nominal Christians. Yet they were churches under the care of an apostle.

Does not our observation confirm the fact of the danger of self-deception? To say nothing of open apostates who turn back to sin, error, or the world, and who are cast out of the church, how many are there that still remain, who though their inconsistencies are

not sufficiently gross to make them the subjects of discipline, too plainly indicate by their total want of all spirituality and earnestness of piety, that they have nothing of Christianity but its name! It is no violation of the law of charity to say that persons so worldly in their spirit, so unsanctified in their temper, so little interested by the concerns of Christ's kingdom, either in their own church or in the world at large, are making but an empty and heartless profession! However painful, then, the fact may be, it is a fact, that the danger of self-deception is alarmingly great.

II. Let me now enquire into the causes of this delusion. The first and chief is, mistaking the forms and restraint of a religious education, or a little temporary excitement of the feelings, for a real change of heart. Nothing short of this change is true piety. As partakers of a fallen and corrupt nature, we must be renewed, and not merely a little altered. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." The imagination may be interested, the feelings may be moved, the conduct improved, and yet the heart remain unchanged. As long as this is the case, there is no abiding principle, no root of godliness in the soul. Every thing but the new nature will subside: all will fall off but this. It is to be expected that under the exciting preaching of the present day, many will be impressed, seem to be converted, and walk well for a time, who are not renewed; their opinions are scriptural, their conduct is correct, and they are admitted into the church upon a profession of their faith; and there is no reason why they should not be. But after a while the novelty of religion ceases, their affections grow cold, and although they do not,

perhaps, become profligate, or leave the church, they settle down into a mere formal attendance upon the means of grace, and remain in this miserable state till death sends them into the eternal world.

The danger arises also from the present external peace and unmolested liberty of the church. In the early days of Christianity, and during many subsequent periods, the profession of religion involved imminent peril to goods, liberty, or life. Persecuting laws were in force against those who believed in Jesus, and confessed their faith. They had, indeed, to take up their cross, and it was through much tribulation they entered the kingdom of God. In such circumstances it might be imagined, no man would profess himself a Christian who was not really one. We might suppose that a prison and a stake would be a sufficient check, not only upon hypocrisy, but upon mere nominal religion. But even this was not always effectual, self-deception existed even then. How much more likely is it that it should prevail now, when a profession of piety, so far from exposing us to scorn, contempt and suffering, is a means of procuring for us an increase of esteem and affection? Evangelical religion and an avowal of it, are become almost fashionable. There is now no fiery ordeal to pass through as a test of our sincerity; no sifting process to separate the chaff from the wheat; and as a natural, though fatal consequence, many profess religion, who are strangers to its power and efficacy.

The wide and easy access to communion, which is afforded by some churches, increases the danger. It cannot be said of them, as it is of the church mentioned in the Word of God, that their gates shall be open continually, and shall not be shut day nor night; for they

can scarcely be said to have any gates at all; or if they have, there is no porter at the gate, to ask the sign of him who enters. True it is, the entrance ought not to be made narrower than Christ has made it. No unscriptural terms of communion should be imposed; no bars nor obstacles set up to keep out those who have a right to enter in; no scaring usages adopted to frighten away timid minds; but surely somebody, either pastor or people, or both together, should with holy caution, Christian tenderness, and experience, examine those who wish to be admitted to fellowship; not, indeed, for the sake of showing and indulging inquisitorial authority, but for guarding the young disciple against deception; and also if he be not correct in his views either of the truth, or of himself, for teaching him the way of God more perfectly. If nothing more be required than for a person to declare himself a Christian without any examination, how great is the danger of his "thinking he is something while he is nothing."

The urgent persuasions of ministers and friends have led many to make a profession of religion, before, in fact, they had any religion to profess. A too eager wish to have a large church, and thus to magnify their pastoral importance, and to multiply the proofs of their usefulness, a most censurable, because an injurious, kind of ministerial vanity, has made some far too hasty in introducing persons to Christian communion. Others, from feelings of false delicacy, have encouraged a profession, amidst many suspicions of its sincerity, rather than wound the minds of the candidates, by suggesting a doubt of their real conversion to God. While there are some, who, acting upon the supposition that religious impressions are likely to ripen into conversion by

the advantages of church fellowship, encourage the subjects of them to come forward and publicly profess Christ, before they truly believe in him. Nor is the conduct of good people less injudicious sometimes towards their relations. A husband feels a pang in his heart at every sacramental season, by the wife of his bosom rising and retiring from his side, when he is about to receive the eucharistic memorials. A wife, who, to all her natural affection for her husband, adds a tender solicitude for his eternal welfare, feels it a great and painful deduction from her spiritual enjoyment that she goes without him to the supper of the Lord. Parents long to have their children with them in the fellowship of the church. Hence, in all these cases, there is sometimes much persuasion used to induce an unprofessing relative to assume the name, and make the confession of a Christian. Now where there is a firm hope, a hope founded on convincing evidence, that the object of solicitude is truly regenerated, and made a partaker of saving grace, this is very proper; but where this evidence is wanting, where there is no good ground for believing that a spiritual change has taken place, it is a most misplaced and mischievous anxiety to wish such persons to enter into the church. It is aiding their self-deception, and being accessory to a delusion which places them at the furthest remove from salvation. They are much more likely to be converted out of the church than in it. Many who have persuaded their friends to make an untimely, because an insincere profession, have lived to repent of their mistaken anxiety, by seeing accumulated evidence that their relatives, though church members, were certainly not Christians.

The improper reliance that some professors place upon the strict mode of examination adopted by most of our churches, is another source of delusion. They have been interrogated by the pastor, and his scrutiny has been aided by some of the deacons or members; they have submitted either verbally, or in writing, a statement of their opinions and feelings, as well as a history of their alleged conversion to God, and on this ground have been received and approved as truly regenerated. "Can such judges," they ask themselves, "be mistaken, such examiners, so competent, so impartial, so particular, form a wrong conclusion? No." Their piety, they suppose, is thus authenticated, their profession attested, and their safety undoubted. All is right. Such is their reasoning, and when in after times a doubt is raised, raised perhaps on grounds which ought to be conclusive, as to the fact of the falseness of their profession, they silence the voice of their conscience, by pleading against its testimony their admission to the church after a rigid examination. Hence, the importance of a pastor's never giving, at the admission of a member, an opinion that he is truly converted; but throwing the whole judgment of the case upon the member's own conscience as in the sight of a heart-searching God; and thus making him responsible for the consequences of any wrong conclusion he may draw concerning his spiritual condition.

Look at these things, and learn whence the danger comes, and how imminent the danger is, of self-delusion as to our state before God, and our safety for eternity. It is not saying too much to affirm that multitudes are thus deluded. The dark record of the Laodicean church, is a fearful proof that whole communities of professing

Christians may be in this appalling condition. It is one of the cunning artifices, the deep devices, the artful machinations of Satan, to lead men into self-deception, when he can no longer hold them in careless indifference; to ruin their souls in the church, when he cannot effect it in the world; to lull them asleep by the privileges of communion, when he cannot continue their slumber amidst the pleasures of sin. O how many is he leading captive this way! How many is he conducting to perdition, whom he has first blindfolded with the bandage of a false profession! How many are there in all our churches, who are in this awful state.

III. I now contemplate the consequences of this self-deception.

It corrupts the purity of the church. Members in this state, are the wood, hay, and stubble, in the walls of the spiritual temple, which disfigure its beauty and impair its strength. They are Achans that trouble the camp of Israel, and bring down the displeasure of the Lord upon its hosts. They are a disease of the spiritual body, which swells its bulk, but destroys its health. Do they by their prayers bring down the blessing of God upon the pastor or the members? Alas! they pray not for themselves. Do they by their piety diffuse vitality and energy through the community? They are cold, lifeless, dead. Do they by their consistency attract others to the church? On the contrary, they disgust and repel. Instead of aiding the force of that concentrated light, by which the church shines upon the dark world around, they envelope it with smoke. Instead of acting as the salt of the earth, they bring corruption into the kingdom of Christ. They are an injury, not only negatively, but positively:

they do harm at all times, but especially on occasions of strife; they are the fuel that feeds the flame of discord.

As it respects religion, they disparage and hinder it, not so much by raising against it the cry of hypocrisy on the ground of their immorality, as by lowering its standard, depreciating its value, diminishing its power, carnalising and secularising it, and reducing it to a greater conformity to the spirit of the world; so that many persons seeing no difference between such professors and themselves, except the mere circumstance of profession, think it not worth their notice.

But, as to the nominal professor himself, how truly awful is the consequence of his delusion! He is perhaps the most hopeless character on earth. Before he assumed the name of Christ, there was hope of him that he would be impressed, convinced, and converted, by some of those discriminating discourses which point out the difference between a regenerated and an unregenerated man; those pungent appeals to the conscience which are so often blessed in awakening those that are without; but now he is proof against all these. He is a professor, a church member; and with this as his shield he wards off every arrow of conviction from his heart. Such things, he says, are for the unprofessing, not for him. His conscience sleeps quietly amidst all the thunders that roll from the pulpit, while the lightnings, carried off by the conductor of his profession, touch not his false hopes, and leave him secure amidst them all. He puts away from himself all the threatenings of the Word, though they are pointed at him, and takes to himself all the privileges and consolations of the righteous, though he enjoys none of them. If at

any time the power of his delusion begins to be shaken by the efforts of his half-awakened conscience, and there rises up in his mind a suspicion that he is not a truly religious man, Satan aids him to regain his delusive quietude by the usual suggestion, "that he is a professor, a church member, and that though he is not perfect, he is not further from it than many others; that he only partakes of the general infirmity of the times, and if he be wrong, who is right? Besides, what is he to do? He is a church member, and should he begin again? Should he repent, believe, and be converted now?" Such logic is generally successful, and the poor creature lies down again to sleep on the sleep of death. Notwithstanding the great number of professing Christians, and the great number of unconverted ones too, how rarely do we meet with any who have been converted after they became professors? How seldom do any such come to their pastor, and express a fear that they have never been truly changed, and follow it up.

Hence it is that some ministers feel it to be the greatest perplexity of all their pastoral avocations, to give answers to persons, who come to advise with them on the subject of making a profession. If from suspicion that the heart of such an individual is not yet right with God, they dissuade him, they may be discouraging one whom they ought to receive and encourage; sending away a babe that ought to be laid in the bosom of the church; breaking the bruised reed, and quenching the smoking flax: while on the other hand, if they encourage the inquirer to come forward, they may be strengthening the delusion of a self-deceived soul, and become accessory to the ruin of an

immortal spirit. Some conscientious men have found and felt this to be the very burden of their lives, and there is no way of gaining relief or ease from it, but by laying down the marks of true conversion, stating what is implied in a christian profession, begging the querist to bring his heart to that test, and making him responsible for the decision in his own case, and all its consequences.

But extend your views to another world, and anticipate if you can the consequences of self-deception as they exist and are perpetuated through eternity. Bunyan, in his inimitable allegory, the "Pilgrim's Progress," after representing the rejection of a false professor, called Ignorance, who had knocked at the portals of heaven and asked admission, concludes his book with these awfully impressive words, "Then I saw that there was a way to hell, even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the city of destruction."

A Professor in hell! Tremendous idea! Horrifying thought! After spending his time on earth in the nominal communion of saints, to spend his eternity in the real fellowship of devils in hell! After belonging to the society of God's people; joining in all their services and their privileges; transacting with them the business of his kingdom; uniting with them in the expulsion as well as the reception of members; then to be sent away into the prison of lost souls! O how dreadful would it be, to be separated from the church of God now, to pass under sentence of excommunication, to be exscinded as a corrupt member of the body, and given over to Satan! But what is that to the sentence of excommunication from the church triumphant, pronounced by Jesus Christ himself at the last day? O

to hear Him say depart! Who does not feel the force of those impressive verses?

"Thou lovely chief of all my joys,
Thou sovereign of my heart,
How could I bear to hear thy voice
Pronounce the sound depart.
The thunder of that dismal word
Would so torment my ear,
'T would tear my soul asunder, Lord,
With most tormenting fear.
O wretched state of deep despair,
To see my God remove,
And fix my doleful station where
I could not taste his love."

IV. Let me now consider what means are necessary and proper to adopt, in order to avoid deception.

Dwell upon the subject. Ponder it deeply. Let it take hold upon your mind, and your mind take hold upon it. Let it not be dismissed from you with the same case as you send into oblivion many other subjects of a religious nature. It is unusually momentous, and has an awfulness about it far beyond the usual topics of reflection. The very idea is terrific, a self-deceived professor; a professor going to perdition! The frequency of it makes it still more alarming. If it were only a bare possibility, an occurrence that might exist, yet that rarely did exist, it would still demand our serious attention; but when it is so common, that it is to be feared there is scarcely any church in which there are not some in this situation, and no large church in which there are not many, how serious, how alarming a matter does it become!

You should bring the matter home to yourselves, and admit not only the possibility of the danger in the abstract, or in reference to others, but in reference to

you. Your profession does not necessarily imply the actual possession of religion. You must not receive it as evidence that you are Christians. In those moments, (and such I presume you spend,) when with more than usual anxiety you ask the question, "Am I really a child of God?" is it not enough to reply, "I am a professor:" for this in any state of the church, and especially the present one, is not a proof, scarcely a presumption, that you are born again of the Spirit. It is possible, then, that you may be deceived, and you should not imagine that there is any thing in your circumstances to render the idea inapplicable to you. You should dread the thought of being deluded. Its fearful consequences should be solemnly meditated upon, seriously and piously revolved. It should be often said with holy trembling, "Oh, if I should be at last deceived." You should examine your state, frequently, deliberately, solemnly, and impartially. Time should be set apart, occasionally, for the special purpose of prayer and self-scrutiny. You should have times and opportunities, of more than usual length and earnestness, for self-examination, when you should look again, and with greater intentness, into your evidences of personal religion; when your former and your present state, your supposed conversion, your conduct, and the state of your affections, should all come under review; when, with a wish not to be deceived, you should ask yourselves for the reasons of the hope that is in you. It is too important a matter to be taken for granted; the consequences of deception are too awful and remediless to be carelessly risked.

It will help you in this solemn business of self-examination, if I place before you a tabular view of

some of the leading marks of false and true professors, arranged in opposite columns.

MARKS OF SELF-DECEIVED PROFESSORS.	MARKS OF TRUE SAINTS.
1. When deep solicitude about salvation ceased as soon as a profession was made, and an entrance into the church was gained.	1. When the mind retains its deep solicitude about salvation, and has it increased by the idea, that a lost professor is the most awful of all characters.
2. When soon after profession there was a relapse into practices, which, though not what are called immoral, were considered to be sinful, and as such were renounced during the season of anxious concern.	2. When there is a continued and increasing dread of sins renounced during concern; and sanctification in those particulars is carried on with vigour.
3. When evil tempers, natural dispositions, and besetting sins, restrained for a season, resume their wonted powers and predominance.	3. When besetting sins are, if not totally eradicated, yet repressed and kept under, by watchfulness and prayer.
4. When under the consciousness of sin, there is a disposition to take comfort against the reproaches of conscience, in the thought that we are professors.	4. When the idea of being a professor, makes the thought of sin more bitter, and renders us restless and uneasy, till we have obtained forgiveness by renewed faith and repentance.
5. When we can reconcile ourselves to a low state of personal piety, or to the prevalence of corruption, or to worldly-mindedness and conformity, by the idea, that we are not more inconsistent or defective than most other professors, and thus take comfort under the reproaches of an accusing conscience, by thinking we are not worse than others.	5. When the sins of others, and especially of professors, and their low state of piety, cause us deep grief, and make us additionally anxious to attain to higher degrees of personal godliness, in order that we may preserve the credit of religion, and prevent dishonour from being cast on the name of Christ.
6. When our habitual frame of mind is not characterised by a sincere, anxious, and studious desire to obey God and please him; and our service is only occasional and prompted by the pricks of conscience, and not constant from an impulse of choice and delight.	6. When we so love God as to feel that our great business and delight is to obey, serve, and please him; and to find that no measure of service will satisfy us, short of absolute perfection.

7. When our obedience is stinted, as well as compulsory, and we are trying with how little religion we can get to heaven, rather than how much holiness we can attain to.

8. When we are glad to hear of the failings of other professors, as an excuse for our own, and are ever ready to quote the misconduct of the saints whose history is recorded in the Scriptures, in justification or palliation of our own.

9. When we feel dislike to preachers for talking so much about revivals of piety in the church, and to close searching sermons that tend to shew professors their short comings, and carry them on to a higher state of personal godliness.

10. When we are much more pleased with the society and conversation of the half-hearted and worldly-minded than of the more spiritual and heavenly-minded, portion of the church, and shun the latter to associate with the former.

11. When we are carrying on any business in itself unlawful, or conducting a lawful one with violations of truth honesty justice and honour.

12. When we take up the idea that religion has nothing to do with trade, and that it is necessary for professors, if they would live, to do as others do; that trade and trading days are our own, and only the sabbath services belong to God.

7. When the motive to obedience, and to all we do in religion, is so far as we can ascertain it, a prevailing desire and aim to glorify God.

8. When the sins of other professors are matters of grief, humiliation, and distress, and the failings of Scripture saints are read with awe, and regarded as beacons to warn us from the rocks on which they split.

9. When we are pleased not only with comforting preaching, and such as dwells on the doctrines of grace, and the privileges of believers, but also with close pungent appeals to the conscience, and discourses that search the heart and lay open its corruptions, and when we are ever ready to co-operate with our pastors in promoting revivals of the church.

10. When we retire from earthly-minded, fasionable, and lukewarm professors, to associate with those who are eminently holy, consistent, and heavenly.

11. When no prospect of gain can induce us to engage in an unlawful occupation; or to carry on a lawful one by forbidden means; and when rather than violate truth, honesty, justice, or generosity, we are content with poverty and a quiet conscience.

12. When we carry religion with us into the shop, to regulate all our business, and consider ourselves under solemn obligation to let our light shine forth before worldly men in all our transactions; to make the six days of labour, as well as the one day of rest, a time for glorifying God; and to consider ourselves his servants at all times and in all places.

13. When we are ever seeking to gratify, serve, and please ourselves, and neither in matters of appetite, nor feeling, nor property, are disposed to practise self-denial, but are resolved to enjoy ourselves and live at ease.

13. When we feel not only an obligation, but a pleasure in practising self-denial, and a willingness to give up the gratifications of appetite and feeling, for the sake of Christ.

14. When we are making it our great and apparently our main business, to accumulate property, to aggrandise our families, and live in splendor, and give little to the cause of God for the conversion of souls, and give that little grudgingly and reluctantly.

14. When, though diligent in business and not careless about property, our chief pleasure in accumulation, is that we have more to do good with; and when we avoid luxuries and splendour, that we may have more to spend for God; and while not unmindful of our families, consider that God has claims upon us, as well as they.

15. When we have little or no tenderness of conscience, and, disregarding scruples of our own conscience, or the cautions of others, proceed to doubtful actions, with as resolute determination, as we do to the performance of those, about which there is no question.

15. When we have a tender conscience easily roused, which will not allow us to engage in doubtful actions.

16. When we live in the habitual indulgence of malevolent, revengeful, and envious tempers.

16. When we are as careful to abstain from all angry, resentful, and malicious feelings, as we are from licentious and dishonest ones.

17. When our religion is one of fear and dread, rather than of hope and love, and we are led to obedience by apprehensions of wrath to come, and not by love to God, and delight in his service.

17. When our religion is the spirit not of fear, and slavish dread, the service rendered by a slave to a tyrant; but of power, and love, and of a sound mind; the service of a child to a father, in whom he confides, and for whom he has the strongest affection.

18. When amidst all the means and incentives to do good, which abound so much in this age, there is no desire to be useful, no impulse of the soul towards any thing going on for the cause

18. When there is a strong, steady, and laborious desire to do good, especially in the way of converting sinners, by personal exertion, by property, by prayer, so that we feel it to be a part of

of Christ, and the salvation of souls.

our calling, and one great end of it, to aid in saving souls from death; when we are distressed that little is doing in this way; are willing to make sacrifices to do good; are continually devising means for this purpose; and rejoice at what others are doing, even if they belong not to our party or denomination.

19. When there is no kind of solicitude about our eternal safety, but the matter is taken for granted, without examination, and the soul reposes upon its profession, concluding without evidence, and sometimes against it, that all is right, and that the matter need not be inquired into.

19. When the mind, though not slavishly or ignorantly anxious about its state or safety, keeps up a jealous watchfulness over itself, and frequently examines itself before God.

20. When during affliction there is more anxiety to have it sanctified than removed, and when there is a prevailing acquiescence in the will of God in painful circumstances.

21. When the soul feels an habitual drawing to heaven, as to its native country and home.

Then, in all these cases, it may be justly feared that the professor in such a state, is self-deceived, and is no true-born child of God.

Then may the professor who has such evidences conclude that he is indeed a true follower of the Lamb, and not self-deceived.

Nor is it enough to trust to your own examination. Aware of the deceitfulness of the human heart, and our proneness through self-love to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, and at the same time recollecting how much we are interested in believing we are right, you should beseech God to make known to you your real condition. You should carry to him the prayer of David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." You should deal honestly with God, and tell him that you wish to know your state, and that you

deprecate being deceived, as the heaviest judgment that could befall you.

If you have reason upon examination to think you have taken up a false opinion of your case, do not blind yourselves to your condition; do not conclude, against evidence, that you are safe; do not attempt to silence the voice of conscience, or corrupt its testimony: this is worse than useless, it is most alarmingly dangerous, and is the last stage of delusion. Instead of this, begin afresh. What is to hinder you? If you are not converted, you may be. Let not the idea of a false profession throw you into despondency. God is as willing to forgive the sin of a false profession, as the sin of no profession. The blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse from this sin. Now repent, now believe, now hope, now love. God waits to be gracious even yet. It is not too late to be renewed yet. The door of mercy is not closed yet. Sincerity of profession is not beyond your reach yet. Begin to be in earnest. Determine to trifle no longer. Set apart time for private prayer, reading the Scriptures, and holy meditation. Be diligent in attendance upon the public means of grace. Make a fresh and entire surrender of yourself to God. But especially look by faith to Jesus Christ, for the pardon of your past insincerity, lukewarmness, and worldliness. Be humble, very humble in your own eyes, and before God: but still do not despair. Exercise dependence upon the Spirit of all grace, confide in his power, and rely upon his mercy. Be thankful, since you were in error, that you have discovered it, and have not been permitted to go on in darkness till you stumbled over the precipice into the yawning pit of destruction below.

If, upon examination, you have good reason to think all is right, rejoice in Christ Jesus. Let the peace of God, which passes all understanding, to which you are called, rule in your hearts, and be thankful. "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God, speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem." This discourse is intended not to disturb the peace of God's people, but to destroy the false confidence of his disguised foes. There are two classes of professors to whom the alarming appeals contained in it do not apply. The first is those eminent christians who have the fullest assurance of hope, and whose assurance is sustained by the joy of faith, the obedience of love, and the patience and purity of hope, whose religion is so vigorous and influential as to be self-evident to themselves and others. They have scarcely need to ask the question, "Am I a child of God?" for the proofs of it are ever within them. Blessed state! happy christians! and all are invited to become such. But there is another class who are not likely to be deceived; those who are truly, and sometimes sorrowfully, anxious about the matter; who are often trying themselves by the Word of God; who know, if they know any thing, that they would not be deluded for ten thousand worlds: who, notwithstanding their many imperfections, their painful consciousness of defects, still know that they do love the Lord Jesus Christ, though with too lukewarm an affection; who, notwithstanding all their doubts and fears, are conscious of a real and sometimes an intense longing after holiness. Be comforted, ye timid followers of the Lamb: self-deceivers are rarely afraid that this is their state and character. Dismiss your fears, and go on your way rejoicing.

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUNG PROFESSOR.

By a Young Professor, I mean a person lately converted, and having but recently assumed the christian name, whether he be in the morning or in the meridian of his days. I cannot do better than submit to the consideration of such persons, the following judicious advice, given by the justly celebrated Jonathan Edwards, of America, to a young lady, who had just commenced the life of faith.

"My dear young Friend,

"As you desired me to send you, in writing, some directions how to conduct yourself in your christian course, I would now answer your request. The sweet remembrance of the great things I have lately seen at S—— inclines me to do any thing in my power to contribute to the spiritual joy and prosperity of God's people there.

"1. I would advise you to keep as great a strife and earnestness in religion, as if you knew yourself to be in a state of nature, and were seeking conversion. We advise persons under conviction, to be earnest and violent for the kingdom of heaven; but when they have attained to conversion, they ought not to be less watchful, laborious, and earnest in the whole work of religion; but the more so, for they are under infinitely greater obligations. For want of this, many persons, in a few months after their conversion, have begun to lose their sweet and lively sense of spiritual things, and grow cold and dark and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows; whereas if they had done as the apostle did, (Philippians iii, 12, 14.) their path would have been as 'the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.'

"2. Do not leave off seeking, striving, and praying for the very same things that we exhort unconverted persons to strive for, and a degree of which you have had already in conversion. Pray that your eyes may be opened, that you may receive sight, that you may know yourself, and be brought to God's footstool: and that you may see the glory of God and Christ, and may be raised from the dead, and have the love of Christ shed abroad in your heart. Those who have most of these things, have need still to pray for them; for there is so much blindness and hardness, pride and death remaining, that they still need to have that work of God wrought upon them, further to enlighten and enliven them, that shall be bringing them out of darkness into God's marvellous light, and be a kind of new conversion and resurrection from the dead. There are very few requests that are proper for an impenitent man, that are not also, in some sense, proper for the godly.

"3. When you hear a sermon, hear for yourself. Though what is spoken may be more especially directed to the unconverted, or to those that, in other respects are in different circumstances from yourself; yet, let the chief intent of your mind be to consider, 'In what respect is this applicable to me? and what improvement ought I to make of this for my own soul's good?'

"4. Though God has forgiven and forgotten your past sins, yet do not forget them yourself: often remember what a wretched bond-slave you were in the land of Egypt. Often bring to mind your particular acts of sin before conversion; as the blessed apostle, Paul, is often mentioning his old blaspheming, persecuting spirit, and his injuriousness to the renewed, humbling his heart, and acknowledging that he was the least of the apostles, and not worthy 'to be called an apostle,' and the 'least of all saints,' and the 'chief of sinners:' and be often confessing your old sins to God, and let that text be often in your mind, 'That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God."

"5. Remember that you have more cause, on some accounts, a thousand times to lament and humble yourself for sins that have been committed since conversion, than before, because of the infinitely greater obligations that are upon you to live to God, and to look upon the faithfulness of Christ, in unchangeably continuing his loving kindness, notwithstanding all your great unworthiness, since your conversion.

"6. Be always greatly abased for your remaining sin, and never think that you lie low enough for it; but yet be not discouraged or

disheartened by it; for though we are exceedingly sinful, yet we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous: the preciousness of whose blood, the merit of whose righteousness, and the greatness of whose love and faithfulness, infinitely overtop the highest mountain of our sins.

"7. When you engage in the duty of prayer, or come to the Lord's supper, or attend any other duty of divine worship, come to Christ as Mary Magdalene did: come and cast yourself at his feet, and kiss them, and pour forth upon him the sweet perfumed ointment of divine love, out of a pure and broken heart, as she poured the precious ointment out of her pure broken alabaster box.

"8. Remember that pride is the worst viper that is in the human heart, the greatest disturber of the soul's peace and of sweet communion with Christ; it was the first sin committed, and lies the lowest in the foundation of Satan's whole building, and is with the greatest difficulty rooted out, and is the most hidden, secret, and deceitful of all lusts, and often creeps insensibly into the midst of religion, even, sometimes, under the disguise of humility itself.

"9. That you may pass a correct judgment concerning [yourself always look upon those as the best discoveries, and the best comforts, that have most of these two effects; those that make you least and lowest, and most like a child; and those that most engage and fix your heart in a full and firm disposition to deny yourself for God, and to spend and be spent for him.

"10. If at any time you fall into doubts about the state of your soul, into dark and dull frames of mind, it is proper to review your past experience; but do not consume too much time and strength in this way: rather apply yourself with all your might, to an earnest pursuit after renewed experience, new light, and new lively acts of faith and love. One new discovery of the glory of Christ's face, will do more toward scattering clouds of darkness in one minute, that examining old experience, by the best marks that can be given, through a whole year.

"11. When the exercise of grace is low, and corruption prevails, and by that means fear prevails; do not desire to have fear cast out any other way than by the reviving and prevailing of love in the heart; by this, fear will be effectually expelled, as darkness in a room vanishes away when the pleasant beams of the sun are let into it.

"12. When you counsel and warn others, do it earnestly, and affectionately, and thoroughly; and when you are speaking to your equals, let your warnings be intermixed with expressions of your

sense of your own unworthiness, and of the sovereign grace that makes you to differ.

"13. If you would set up religious meetings of young women by yourselves, to be attended once in a while, besides the other meetings you attend, I should think it would be very proper and profitable.

"14. Under special difficulties, or when in great need of, or great longings after, any particular mercy for yourself or others, set apart a day for secret prayer and fasting by yourself alone; and let the day be spent, not only in petitions for the mercies you desire, but in searching your heart, and in looking over your past life, and confessing your sins before God, not as is done in public prayer, but by a very particular rehearsal before God of the sins of your past life, from your childhood hitherto, before and after conversion, with the circumstances and aggravations attending them, and spreading all the abominations of your heart very particularly, and as fully as possible, before him.

"15. Do not let the adversaries of the cross have occasion to reproach religion on your account. How holily should the children of God, the redeemed and the beloved of the Son of God, behave themselves. Therefore, 'walk as the children of the light, and of the day,' and 'adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour;' and especially abound in what are called the 'Christian virtues, and which make you like the Lamb of God; be meek and lowly of heart, and full of pure, heavenly, and humble love to all; abound in deeds of love to others, and self-denial for others; and let there be in you a disposition to account others better than yourself.

"16. In all your course walk with God, and follow Christ, as a little, poor, helpless child, taking hold of Christ's hand, keeping your eye on the marks of the wounds in his hands and side, whence came the blood that cleanses you from sin, and hiding your nakedness under the skirt of the white, shining robes of his righteousness.

"17. Pray much for the ministers and the church of God; especially that he would carry on his glorious work which he has now begun, till the world shall be full of his glory."

If it be necessary to add any thing to the contents of this excellent letter, it appears to me comprised in the following particulars.

Set out in your profession with clear and impressive ideas of what it implies, and for what purpose it is to be

made; and for this end, read with great attention the previous chapters which treat on those subjects.

Seek to possess and to retain a comfortable sense of your interest in the blessings of salvation, even the witness of the Spirit, that you are a child of God; and remember that evidence of piety is not so much to be sought in strong and high emotions of any kind, as in real humility, self-distrust, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, sorrow for sin, and a continual effort to regulate your thoughts, feelings, and conduct by the Word of God.

Do not expect to find, in your own case, every thing you have heard or read of, in the experience of others. In the work of grace there is substantial uniformity, but circumstantial variety. Especially remember that religion is not a principle of such self-preserving energy, as that when once planted in the soul, it will continue to thrive and increase without effort; but on the contrary, is of so tender and delicate a nature as to require great, constant, and persevering anxiety, watchfulness and care.

Do not expect to be made happy by religion unless you become eminent Christians. Those who would enjoy their profession must drink deep of the wells of salvation. A lukewarm, half-hearted Christian enjoys neither the world nor religion.

Do not make the average piety of professors the model or standard of your own; but look to the standard set up in the Word of God. Consider not what professors are, but what they should be. Many are deceiving themselves, and if you copy them in their delusion, you will follow them in their ruin. This being satisfied to be as others are, has had a more

disastrous influence on the church and the world than all other causes put together.

Remember that the evidence of your religion ceases when any thing else has the first place in your thoughts and affections.

Never suffer any day to pass without reading a portion of Holy Scripture; and be jealous of every book that becomes a rival with the Bible.

Acquire and maintain great tenderness of conscience, and recollect there are no little sins for a professor.

Begin your christian course with habits of usefulness. A constant desire and aim to do good, as instruments of saving sinners, and raising the standard of piety and benevolent activity in our fellow-christians, is one of the ends of our conversion, and a convincing proof of its reality.

Do not neglect religious duty, because you suppose your feelings are not right at the time. Action begets emotion: and right feeling comes with right doing.

In the great work of mortification do not despond and give up the work, although often defeated in the attempt to conquer and eradicate a corruption. It must be conquered; it may be, by divine grace assisting your endeavours; and it will be, if you are resolute and persevering.

Recollect, you as much need supporting and preserving grace, as you did converting grace. Regeneration supplies no stock of it which makes you independent of God. "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." We should seek to "know what is the exceeding greatness of God's power to us-ward who believe." Our every act as believers must be performed in the dependence and confidence of faith.

Do you need encouragement? Are you alarmed at the difficulties and dangers of the way? Does your heart faint to think how many have made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience? Consider, you enjoy the sympathies and prayers of the whole church, the watchfulness and care of your pastor, and what is of far more value and consolation, the notice, love, intercession, and support of the great and good Shepherd, who gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom. He will not forget the lambs: their feeble bleat attracts his notice, their helplessness draws his attention, and for them he puts forth all his pastoral kindness and skill. Consider also, that when Jesus Christ begins a good work, he will carry it on to perfection. You have all the infinite resources of the Holy Spirit to depend upon, and to draw from. Exceeding great and precious promises, which are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus, are continually speaking encouragement to you from God. And behold, in the church around you, professors grey in the service of the Lord, who were once young and trembling as you now are, but who have been kept through all the duties, difficulties, and temptations of perhaps forty or fifty years; and if you look into the unseen world, there are millions round the throne, who have been kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. The faithful love and all-sufficient grace which have kept them, can and will keep you. With these considerations, "Go on your way rejoicing."*

* Many of the particulars summarily expressed in this chapter, will be amplified in the subsequent parts of the book.

CHAPTER V.

COMPARISON BETWEEN PROFESSORS OF THE PRESENT AND FORMER GENERATION.

"Say not thou," enjoins the wise man, "what is the cause that the former days were better than these, for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this." This language could not have referred to such comparisons as are made cautiously for the sake of promoting improvement, but only to such as are instituted peevishly to cherish discontent, and to justify misanthropy. It has been common for good men of every age to complain of the degeneracy of their times, both as regards the world and the church.

"Had it all along been true, it is impossible to conceive, bad as the world is, how much worse it must have been. The truth is, we are on many accounts exceedingly incompetent judges. There is much difficulty in taking a comparative view, that shall be sufficiently comprehensive and impartial, of our own and other times. We are extremely apt to confine our estimate to particular descriptions of character and departments of conduct, which happen, whether from accidental circumstances, or from our peculiar mental temperament, to have more particularly attracted our attention and impressed our minds, and to overlook the endless variety of modifications and aspects under which the corruptions of our nature displays itself; to forget that in human society, there is a fashion in morality, as there is in every thing else, of which it is the very essence to fluctuate, and to show in successive periods capricious and changeful predilections; that religion and virtue though declining in the

quarter of the country which forms the immediate sphere of our observation, may be reviving and making progress in another; that when the prevalence of any particular vice has been the occasion of suffering to ourselves, we naturally feel and speak strongly under the irritation of self love, magnifying to our imagination both the intrinsic enormity of the evil, and the extent to which it is practised. So much do these and other causes affect the judgment, that two persons, differing in circumstances and in mental constitution and moral sentiment, shall produce from the very same scene of life and manners, descriptions so unlike each other, as that we shall be at a loss to believe the indentity of the subject; just as two painters, following each his own taste and fancy, may, from the same assortment of objects, by variety of grouping and arrangements, by the different degrees of retirement or of prominence given to each, and by their opposite styles of colouring and shadowing, present us with two pictures so totally dissimilar as that we may look long and narrowly ere we discover the points of coincidence."*

These remarks, so true and so wise, should impose caution on any one who attempts to institute a comparison between his own generation of professors, and those which have gone before it. But still most ages have some features so broad, and so deeply marked, that any man with even moderate sagacity and impartiality, may venture to pronounce upon them.

In speaking first, of the excellences of the present race of professors, as compared with some that have preceded it, I may venture to mention as no unimportant or undistinguished one, a more marked and decided tone of religious sentiment; a more public and explicit avowal of evangelical doctrine. I do not mean merely a belief in the doctrine of the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, and the great fundamental truth of the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ; but in connexion with these, the all-important doctrines of justification by faith alone, and the regeneration of the heart by the

* Dr. Wardlaw on Ecclesiastes. Vol. 1. page 345.

Holy Spirit. These are now held not only by the great body of orthodox Dissenters, and Wesleyan Methodists, but by a large proportion of the clergy of the Church of England; and are put forward without hesitation or reserve, in bold and striking relief, in their preaching. From the Restoration till within the past thirty years, those glorious and fundamental truths, so far as regards the Church of England, lay enshrined in the Prayer-book; but they have now obtained a resurrection from the desk, and an ascension into the pulpit, and from thence they are exhibited and preached with divine blessing. A life-giving system of doctrine has taken the place of a dead theology and a cold morality; and the sentiments of Wickliffe, Cranmer, Hooper, and Ridley, are again heard in the buildings which formerly resounded with their voices. As to the Dissenters, a clear bright effulgence of the truth has broken forth from that cloudy divinity, which at one time too extensively prevailed, and seemed rather intended to obscure than to reveal the Sun of Righteousness. It must be admitted that a century ago there was a vagueness of sentiment among many of the Nonconformist ministers; evangelical doctrines were merged in devotional feeling; the trumpet gave an uncertain sound from a number of their pulpits; and many of the people knew neither their own opinions nor those of their pastors, on the person of Christ, or the work of the Spirit. Arianism or Sabellianism threw a dark cold shadow over many of our churches, in which piety drooped and zeal had no place. But the age of indifference and latitudinarianism is past: a zeal for the truth as it is in Jesus, has sprung up; vague theological generalities have given place to definite Christian sentiments: no pastor

is received, no preacher is heard, no member admitted to our fellowship, whose orthodoxy is suspected. Confession, both of evangelical doctrines and their vital influence upon the heart, is required of all who take the oversight, or enter into the communion, of our churches.

It is delightful also to notice with how much greater clearness and precision the doctrines of grace, as they are called, are now stated from the pulpit and the press, than they were at one time, when enveloped in the clouds of those systems of theology which border so closely on Antinomianism. The writings of Williams, Fuller, Scott, and Wardlaw, have caused the truth to be seen in its own pure bright light, and delivered multitudes from the iron fetters of a hard, cold, and merciless theology.

Our land is vocal with the joyful sound of the preaching of Christ crucified, calling the dense population of our cities and great towns, and the inhabitants of our smaller towns and villages to the cross for salvation. The church and the meeting-house echo to each other, "The Name that is above every name," and the worshippers of both commingle with each other, as they pour forth from their respective places of worship, with their souls thrilling with the notes of the same heavenly music of redeeming love.

Nor ought I, while speaking of the pulpit, to omit the press, from which evangelical truth is now flowing in the copious streams of its millions of publications. Infidelity, heresy, and irreligion, have not monopolised the glorious art of printing. To say nothing of other institutions, I mention only the Religious Tract Society, that spiritual armoury for the church of Christ, where

the whole levy en masse may be supplied with the weapons of truth, and are furnished according to their ability, for the conflict with the powers of darkness. Who will deny, that this zeal for the truth, clear, defined, evangelical truth, is a heart-reviving feature of the age?

Dr. Owen, after lamenting the decay of vital religion in his day, goes on to say:

"There is yet another consideration rendering the present state of the christian religion in the world yet more deplorable. The only principle of evangelical obedience is sacred truth and our faith therein. That alone is the doctrine which is according to godliness, and all acceptable obedience to God is the obedience of faith. Whatever men do, or pretend unto, in a way of duty unto him whereof the truth of the gospel is not the spring and measure, which is not guided and animated thereby, it is not what God at present requireth, nor what he will eternally reward. Wherefore, although men may, and multitudes do, under a profession of that truth, live in open rebellion against its power; yet the wounds of religion are not incurable, nor its stains indelible, whilst the proper remedy is owned, and wants only due application. But if this truth itself be corrupted or deserted, if its most glorious mysteries be abused or despised, and if its most important doctrines be impeached of error and falsehood, if the vain imaginations and carnal reasonings of the serpentine wits of men be substituted in their room, or exalted above them, what hope is there of recovery? The breach will grow like the sea, until there be none to heal it. If the fountains of the waters of the sanctuary be poisoned in their first rising, they will not heal the nations unto whom they come. Where the doctrine of truth is corrupted, the hearts of men will not be changed by it, nor their lives reformed."

This is strictly true. But blessed be God, I do not think that this dark omen threatens us. No such portent, as the orb of truth sinking into the clouds of heresy, or the mists of latitudinarianism, now hangs on the horizon of the church of Christ. True, there are some things, which, if not checked, look with malign aspect on the spiritually brightening prospects of the

Church of England. There is no lover of our Lord Jesus Christ, but must unfeignedly and heartily rejoice in the wondrous revival of pure christian doctrine within the pale of that communion; and none but must tremble for the result of the attempt now being made by certain Oxford professors and divines, aided by some high church periodicals, to arrest the progress of what may be termed the second Reformation, and to arrest it by reviving in part, the errors which the first was designed to abolish. But it will not succeed. If it should, then may it safely be affirmed, that the Establishment is destined to die, not by the hand of any of its foes, but by the matricidal violence of its own children. But there is far too much genuine, healthy, and determined Protestantism in the Church of England to warrant any great apprehension of such a result.

Nor is it any considerable abatement from the statement I have made as to the prevalence of sound Christian doctrine among the professors of religion in the present day, that the deluded followers of Irving, as well as some other sects, have in some measure multiplied, and astounded us by their extravagant absurdities. Fanaticism, in some form or other, is always sure to make its appearance, and to do its mischief, in an ardent and excited age; just as thunder storms gather and explode amidst the fervid heat of summer. The high temperature of religious feeling, when unchecked by sober thought, supplies the elements of such fantastic notions; but they must in the nature of things, soon spend themselves, and leave the atmosphere calm, and clear, and bright.

Not, however, that I mean to say that the Christians of our day are much given to the perusal of theological

treatises, or are profoundly learned in the science of divinity. Far from it. Nothing but what is strictly orthodox in sentiment will be received by them; but they are content with small portions of knowledge, and such as can be obtained without the cost of much time, or the labour of much thinking. There was an era when the church of God thought herself much indebted to those devoted men, who furnished not their own times alone, but all coming ages, with admirable materials for thinking, and abundant food for meditation, in their incomparable volumes; when private and even unlettered Christians, were familiar with octavos and quartos; when Hall and Reynolds, Owen and Baxter, Howe and Bates, Doddridge and Watts, were the daily companions of the people of God. But who converses with those venerable fathers now? What is the current sacred literature of the pious in this age? Who now thinks of purchasing any thing but magazines and reviews, memoirs, elementary treatises, and compendiums of truth? How strange it would be to find a serious friend or neighbour late at night studying Edwards on "The Freedom of the Will," Dwight's Theology, or Scott's Essays. If Christians read, it must be something sound, and this is a cause of gratitude: but it must be also something short; something that is new and moving, something that may be read without much thought. A considerable portion of the reading of Christians in the present day is religious intelligence: it lays hold not merely of the imagination, but of the holiest and most philanthropic feelings of the heart; it is happily become abundant in consequence of the operations of our religious institutions; it is cheapened down to the pecuniary resources of almost the poorest

individual; and moreover it supplies the great stimulus which not only sustains, but increases, benevolent exertion. He that would attempt to stop these sources of information, would not only rob myriads of Christians of some of the purest joys they will ever taste on this side of heaven, but would cut off the streams of beneficence which flow through the channels of our societies to irrigate the moral deserts of the world. But still we must take care that even this species of reading may not become engrossing. If zeal increase, knowledge should increase with it. An exclusive or prevailing taste for religious news will be followed by some of the lamentable effects which result from the reading of works of fiction. The mind will in both cases be gradually unfitted for deep and patient investigation. A constant and intense application of the mind to exciting facts, will indispose it for the contemplation of principles, and produce an increasing demand for something new and striking, which will go on increasing the appetite for novelty, till what is old, plain, and simple, will become utterly tasteless and insipid.

I mention now another excellence by which the professors of the present age are distinguished, and it is indeed a noble one; I mean that spirit of holy zeal for the propagation of religion, both at home and abroad, which is so general and so active. The Puritans and first Nonconformists, it must be admitted, did little in this way, for indeed they had little or no opportunity to do it; the ruthless, bloody and remorseless spirit of persecution, left them no other way of diffusing Christianity, than by giving an example of suffering patience, or flying before the storm of oppression, and carrying the gospel into the land of their exile. This they

neglected not to do, and the gigantic Republic of the United States of America is in great measure the result of their migration: a country destined to share with the father-land, the honour of converting the world to Christ. But at the end of the next half century we find the churches of our own order, when protected by the Act of Toleration, drawing the curtains around them and lying down to slumber upon their newly obtained liberty. More than a century was given to their inglorious repose; more than a century was lost to the world; during which, probably, two thousand millions of immortal souls went into eternity unpitied and unsanctified. It is melancholy now to look back and think of the silence and inactivity which reigned over the Christian world before the present missionary spirit arose. The valley of dry bones spread out before our forefathers, but none went forth to prophesy to the slain. There were no Sunday-schools, no tract societies, no Bible societies, for our own country, and no missionary societies for foreign nations, except such as had little else than the name. The state of the poor at home, and of heathen nations abroad, was almost as well known then as now; there were printing presses then as there are now, and also ships, colonies, and commerce, but next akin to nothing was done for the conversion of the world.

Blessed be the God of love and truth, things are different now: he has poured out the beginnings of his grace upon this age, and has awakened and called his people to the work of evangelising the world. They begin to understand and to feel that the spirit of Christianity is essentially a proselyting spirit; that to diffuse the gospel is no less a duty than to believe it; and that

no man can really fulfil all his duties as a Christian, who does not in some way or other, seek to make his neighbours such. Look around on the Christian church. Every denomination has its missionary society, and every congregation its missionary organization. Every object on which the eye of benevolence can rest, which needs its exertions, has its separate and appropriate confederacy of mercy for its relief; so that it is becoming difficult to mention a subject of sorrow, ignorance, or wickedness, who is not found specially classified, and provided with relief suited to his peculiar circumstances. Let any one visit our metropolis in the month of May, that beautiful season of the year so wisely selected to harmonise the appearances of the worlds of nature and grace, when the budding hopes and quickening energies of both are put forth together; let him witness the signs of holy activity which are conspicuous even amidst the teeming population and multitudinous pursuits of that wondrous city; let him read the long list of public meetings, occupying a large portion of the whole month; let him sum up the number of societies for diversified objects, connected with the spread of religion through such multiplied channels over so many parts of the world; let him count the stations occupied and the agents employed; let him compute the money collected, and hear the reports read; and then let him say if God, in his sovereign mercy, has not granted one rich and glorious distinction to the professors of the age in which he lives.

Think of the money, the time, the gratuitous labour, and the influence, that are bestowed, in support of all these institutions; and think also of the increasing spirit of liberality spreading through our churches; the

poor give now what the rich gave formerly, and some of the rich give in a year, what their wealthy ancestors scarcely contributed in a whole life. The single guinea is multiplied into tens, and into hundreds. There is a continual expansion of the heart going on, which is preparing for the time when "holiness to the Lord shall be written on the merchandise of Tyre, and the bells of the horses." Sums are contributed which would astonish those who have gone to their rest, if they could visit earth again. And when money cannot be given in this proportion, how many are giving their time, and for that purpose taking it from domestic enjoyment, literary leisure, innocent recreation, or necessary repose. Persons of all ranks, and of all ages, and of both sexes, are engaged. Evangelization is the cry of the day, the watch-word of the age; so that the person who gives nothing, and does nothing, is charged with deficient, and suspected of questionable, piety.

Not that we have yet reached the height of our duty, and are doing all we ought to do. Far, very far from it, we are vastly below our obligations. Those that come after us, will smile at our notions of liberality, and our grand-children will be ready to question whether we rightly understood the meaning of the term. What we are beginning they will carry on and improve. Ours is but the spring, which by the time it reaches them will have swollen into a stream; through God's grace, we are doing something, but we must do more. The tradesman must give a larger share of his profits, and the rich man dip far deeper into his purse. There must be a prevailing willingness to practise self-denial, and to make sacrifices for the cause of Christ. We are yet immeasurably below our principles and professions in

what we do for the conversion of men's souls. If we really believe that the loss of one human soul is a greater catastrophe than the wreck of an empire, or a world, what are we doing to prevent the loss of millions of such souls? Our zeal ought to be, and must be, more fervent, and it should also become more pure. There is in this day far too much blowing of trumpets, too much display, too much parade and ostentation, too much noise and bustle, too much, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord," too much individual and congregational vanity, and too much forbidden incense and strange fire in the censers of those who minister at the altar. This is to be regretted as well as acknowledged; and should be amended as well as regretted. God will not give the full measure of his blessing till we serve him in a better spirit, with deeper humility, and a more devout mind.

But still, the spirit of the age is an active and a liberal one. The great principle begins to be recognised, that every church is, or ought to be, a home and foreign missionary society in itself, and every member of every church, in one way or other, a missionary. It begins to be felt that each Christian is put in trust with the gospel for the benefit of the world, and that he is an unfaithful trustee, abusing his trust, and incurring a dreadful responsibility, if he does nothing to spread Christianity in the world. I look upon this spirit as the morning star of the millennial day: it is a revival of primitive Christianity, and will not fail to bring on the latter day glory. It is of more consequence than all the organizations of religious zeal, all the noble institutions of the day; for if these were by any means destroyed to morrow, it would cause them to be re-built,

on a larger, and an improved scale. The spirit is abroad, which is to lead all nations into the fold of Christ; and after excluding from our consideration all zeal which has its origin in any impure motive, there must be a vast mass of genuine piety in existence, to draw forth so much liberality and effort for extending the kingdom of Christ. There has been nothing like it since the days of the apostles. God has shed upon us some of his choicest gifts and richest honours; may we not be insensible to our high distinction!

What renders this missionary spirit the more remarkable in itself, and the more to be relied upon as a token for good, and is the best proof of its heavenly origin, is the extraordinary circumstances of the age during which it has carried on its operations. It commenced amidst the throes and convulsions of states caused by the French Revolution, and sent forth its first messages of peace and good-will to the world, when the hearts of our nation had scarcely ceased to palpitate with the enormities of the reign of terror. How could it have been expected they would think of the miseries of distant countries, when they were trembling for their own existence? Yet then, amidst the dread of invasion from abroad, and of intestine commotion at home, a society was formed for the conversion of the world. During all our national struggles with the Gallican conqueror, this society held on its noble career, as little diverted from its course, as the angel flying through the midst of heaven, with the everlasting gospel for all nations, can be supposed to be appalled by the noise of the winds or the tumults of the ocean. It neither paused in war, nor relaxed in peace, nor lost its power to interest the public mind, amidst the greatest

political excitement which ever agitated the nations of Europe. The poor Pagans, living in sin and dying in despair, were never forgotten, when kings were tumbling from their thrones, and crowns were rolling in the dust. National bankruptcy has threatened us, but still amidst the crash of falling banks and houses of commerce, no one ever dreamed of stopping the supplies necessary for missionary operations. Such a thought as the suspending of our zeal till the storm had blown over, never entered the minds of our directors. And now what is the aspect of the times? Was the contest of parties ever more fierce? Was the fever of excitement ever higher? Was there ever a time when so much animosity, ill-will, and engrossing party spirit, were in operation? And what has become of the missionary cause? There, there it is, floating like the ark over the depths of the deluge, safe and calm amidst the uproar of the elements, piloted by heaven, and bearing the destiny of earth. O what a spectacle does the kingdom at the present moment present, of glory on one hand, and disgrace on the other; all parties wrangling with each other, yet all struggling for the conversion of the world; retiring from the scenes of their common warfare, to pursue, each in his private sphere, the works of charity and peace. It was a glorious scene at one of the May meetings in the metropolis, when upon the resignation of a popular ministry, the country was at the highest pitch of political enthusiasm, and our national destiny was trembling in the balance, to see with what abstraction of mind and unabated zeal, the different societies went to their labour of love; and to behold how the evangelists of the world pursued their work, amidst events which almost paralysed trade. And at

this present moment, not a single missionary society is neglected, nor does any one party relax its missionary ardour, for the sake of pursuing with greater single-mindedness any sectarian object. Nothing diverts the attention of the friends of missions from their object, or damps their zeal, or diminishes their liberality. The gospel is spreading abroad, while the friends of it are drawing off from each other at home. Does it not look therefore as if God had indeed called us, and keeps us to our work of converting the world, having bound us to it by a tie which nothing shall break? And what a delightful thing it is to think that though we are breaking from each other, we cannot break away from helping a perishing world. Is not this a token for good, a bright omen shedding a lustre upon many dark signs?

II. I now go on to point out our defects and blemishes, and show wherein we come short of others that have gone before us.

1. Professors are in danger, and in too many instances fall into it, of neglecting those parts of religion which are strictly personal, and of substituting social for individual piety. Religion, in the first and most important view of it, is essentially a personal and individual concern. It is an affair between God and a man's own soul. Each person has to transact with Jehovah, through Christ, for himself. In the midst of the church, and as a member of it, he is still dealt with by God, apart and alone. He has individual privileges. He is singly as much the object of the divine love of the Father, the purchase of the Son's blood, and the communication of the Spirit's influence, as if the whole scheme of redemption were contrived and

executed for him. He may, without hesitation or presumption, say, "God is my God; Christ is my Saviour; the Spirit is my Sanctifier; mine is the covenant of grace, with all its varied, rich, eternal blessings; mine the promise of the word; heaven, glory, immortality, are all mine." Yes! it is with each Christian in the world of grace, as it is with each man in the world of nature; the latter has the whole effulgence of the sun pouring upon him, as much so as if there was not another eye but his to behold the splendour; and the former has the whole plenitude of divine grace descending upon his soul, as truly as if there were no others that needed or shared it. Blessed thought! he has an individual importance, and does not derive it merely from his association with the church. But then he has individual duties as well as privileges. The whole and entire obligations of the moral law, of the rule of Christian love, of the duty to mortify all sin, rest upon him; he is to believe, to hope, to love, to pray, for, and by, himself. He has his own soul to be saved; his own heart to be renewed and sanctified; his own temper to be rendered meek, gentle, and benevolent; and nothing can release him from the obligation to do all this; no, not even the most assiduous attention to the welfare of others; for zeal cannot be a substitute for piety. The attendance at the committee room cannot be an excuse for neglecting the closet; and the support of a society can be no apology for neglecting to mortify a corruption. Yet there is a tendency in this day to forget this. It is a day of association and organization; men act much with others, and there is imminent danger of losing sight of religion as a personal, private, and individual concern. We are too

much drawn away from our closets and ourselves. Our eye is taken off from our own hearts and diverted to others; we lose the habit of silent meditation in that of discussion; we have become inapt for self-conference; we are so accustomed to excitement, that we feel dull in solitude; we are so wont to lean upon others that our piety seems scarcely able to walk or stand alone. We find it difficult to detach ourselves from our fellows, and make ourselves the first and separate objects of our solicitude, and to carry on what belongs to us personally. Private is neglected for social prayer; the Bible for the sermon, and the closet for the committee room. The great system of revealed truth is not sufficiently brought before us in its grandeur, glory and demands, as a matter for our individual contemplation, reception and application. This is one defect.

2. Another, which is akin to it, is a want of that high-toned piety, and deep devotional feeling, which characterised the Christians of some past ages. This remark will apply to the professors of all denominations. The life of faith, hope, and prayer, is too low with them all. Engrossed too much by trade, politics, and social entertainments, they have, with the exception of a little time redeemed for the public institutions of the day, scarcely any leisure for the exercises of the closet, and the high communings with God, in which those who have gone before us indulged. The diaries, memoirs, and funeral sermons, handed down to us from past times, seem to indicate, that if we excel in diffusing religion, our ancestors surpassed us in exemplifying it; and that if we are above them in active zeal, they were our superiors in serious, humble, and spiritual piety.

"The increasing demand of the great Christian public," says Dr.

Humphrey, of America, "is for excitement; for something that will produce strong feeling, and gratify an ever-craving curiosity. Like the Athenians, and the strangers which were there, how many would apparently be glad to spend their time in nothing else but either to tell or hear something new. Hence the religious dissipation of large towns, the eagerness of inquiry after new preachers, and the running from one place of worship to another, for the mere gratification of a vain curiosity. Hence the growing aversion of any thing didactic and argumentative in the pulpit, and the increasing demand for what are called popular discourses; so that unless the preacher makes some strong appeals to the sympathies and passions of his hearers; unless he takes them out into the grave-yard, or carries them to the abode of recent widowhood, and supperless orphanage; or transports them to Juggernaut or the Ganges; he is dry and heartless, or plodding and metaphysical, and of course, scarcely to be tolerated. To sit, as our fathers of the last century used to do, Sabbath after Sabbath, under sound doctrinal discussion, and to see the hour glass turned before the improvement of the sermon, who could endure it?"

The excitement of the passions, rather than the elevation of the soul to God and the cultivation of the heart, seems to be the religion of a great many of the present day. Of the crowded and deeply affected audiences that hang in breathless silence upon the popular preachers in the church, chapel, and meeting house, and fancy themselves so powerfully impressed by the discourses of their favourite minister, how few, comparatively, are found spending their hours in the closet, plying the work of mortification of sin, promoting the spirit of charity, communing with God, and rising on the wings of faith and hope to the contemplation of eternity! My opinion, then, is that the number of real Christians is greatly increased, but that in general they are not eminent for devotional and personal excellence. Religion is spread over a wider surface, but in these respects it has lost in depth what it has gained in breadth; it is the religion of activity rather than of mortification;

of the imagination rather than the heart; of the place of public resort rather than of the closet; and does not blend enough of the deep conviction, elevated devotion, and patient self-denial of martyrdom, with the bustling spirit of proselytism.

3. Perhaps a want of conscientiousness may be charged upon many of the professors of the present day. I have no narrow sphere of observation, and am acquainted, either personally or by report, with many Christians of various denominations, and I am compelled to believe that there is among them all a sad deficiency of that exquisite tenderness of conscience, which is the most unequivocal sign and expression of eminent piety. Bright and illustrious examples, I allow, there are in every section of the church at this day, and not a few of them, of Christians watchful and jealous over themselves, even unto trembling, lest they should sin against God or man, sensitive even to painfulness on the subject of transgression, and making their whole life a holy mixture of vigilance, penitence, and prayer. But, ah! how many are there of an opposite character, whose conscience, though sufficiently alive to the greater acts of transgression, has neither vision to discern the criminality of little sins, nor susceptibility to feel it! Where are the men, who on the indulgence of a single feeling contrary to purity or love, or the utterance of a single word opposed to truth or kindness, or the performance of a single act infringing, in the smallest degree, the law of justice, honour, or mercy, would feel in their spirit an instant wound, which nothing could mollify or heal, but a fresh exercise of repentance and faith; the men who ever keep their consciences in the light of revelation, and who live,

in reference to both small things and great, in habitual reverence of this faithful monitor and awful judge? There are some such, but they are too few in any division of the Christian church in this day. This want of conscientiousness is strikingly apparent in the mode of conducting the affairs of business. This, however, will be enlarged upon in a subsequent part of the volume, as will also

4. Conformity to the world, which is now one of the sins of God's professing people.

5. Scarcely any deficiency of the church in the present day, as compared with preceding generations, is more apparent than the neglect of domestic religion. This, I believe, is generally admitted, and not without reason. In addition to the devout and regular performance of family prayer night and morning, the evenings of the Sabbath were with our forefathers, seasons consecrated to the catechetical instruction of their children. The father with patriarchal grace, acted as the prophet, as well as the priest and king of his household; and as a consequence naturally to be looked for, the churches were principally replenished from the families of the righteous. Is it so now? Are the communicants at the Lord's table, either in the Church of England, among the Methodists, or the Dissenters, chiefly composed of "the children of the kingdom?" How is this, but from a relaxation of domestic religion? Family prayer, though in few families omitted, is not performed with that constancy, solemnity, and fervour which is calculated to interest and to edify; parental authority is not maintained with that steadiness which is adapted to inspire respect, and that affection which is likely to secure obedience: and as to the judicious, diligent, and

engaging communication of religious instruction, which is necessary to inform the mind, to enlighten the conscience, and to form the character, it is in some families almost entirely neglected. I bring no false accusation when I affirm that in many houses, both among Episcopalians and Dissenters, the heads of which stand high among the professors of the day, family religion is but the form of godliness without its power. On the other hand, it is my happiness to have been the delighted witness, and that in many cases too, of the blessed and holy results of a good system of domestic religious instruction. But it cannot be said that this generally prevails in the religious world. Far more solicitude is felt, and far more pains are taken by many, to educate their children for this world than for the next, and to fit them to act their part well for time, than to prepare them for the scenes of eternity. Catechetical instruction, I lament to think, has fallen too much into desuetude and gone out of fashion with many. True it is, that a judicious and well-informed parent can dispense with such helps, and leading his children at once to behold the wide expanse of religious truth, as it spreads out in boundless grandeur in the Bible, can point to the separate beauties and harmonious scenes of the whole prospect. But this is not the case with all. They need something more than the Scriptures, and can do little, except in the way of catechising. Besides, it is a question whether the adoption of both plans is not, when both are well conducted, the most perfect method of conveying religious truths to the minds of the young. A catechetical answer, if well drawn, not only helps the memory of the learner, but aids his understanding too: it is the rays of many separate passages of Scrip-

ture converging at a point, which reflects back its light upon the source whence it is derived. It is the abuse of these helps, not their use, that is to be discouraged. Our generation is rich in advantages of another kind: I mean those numerous interrogatory exercises upon the Scriptures which have been published for the instruction of the young, and which leave the present generation of parents still more inexcusable if they neglect the religious education of their children. It is to be recollected, however, that the communication of knowledge is only one part of a religious education. The head may be attended to, while the heart is neglected; and it is the obvious tendency of this age to carry on the education of the one far in advance of the discipline of the other. It is the mistake of the people of the world in the business of general education, to attach more importance to literature and physical science, than to virtue; and no less the mistake of pious people in their systems of religious education, to be more earnest in communicating scriptural knowledge, than in forming the religious character. Here then is the defect to be supplied, a want of deep anxiety, and judicious, persevering and prayerful effort to train up our children in the way they should go, and to prepare them to become members first of the church on earth, and then of the church in heaven.

6. The last thing I shall mention as to the inferiority of the present generation of professors to their ancestors, is a certain kind of fickleness in their religious profession, a want of fixedness and solemnity in their christian habits. Often hastily assumed, it is then of course lightly held, and easily changed or modified. It is

painful to observe what very trivial causes in many instances will induce an alteration in the whole conduct of some persons and lead them to break off from their religious connexions, to retire from the place where their fathers worshipped God, and forsake the minister who was blessed to their own conversion. Nor does the instability stop here, for they can shift themselves from one denomination to another, with as much ease as they can their cushions and their books from one chapel to another. Continual migrations are going on from the Church of England to Dissenters, and from the Dissenters back to the Church; and also between the different denominations and congregations of Nonconformists. If this were really the result of conviction, it must be approved and not condemned; for a man should not consider his religious sentiments merely in the light of an hereditary possession, but should adopt them as a matter of intelligent and conscientious preference; it is beneath our dignity as men, much more our profession as Christians, to have no other reason for our belief, than that it was held by our forefathers before us. But how many cases are there in which persons are neither held by hereditary prejudice, nor moved by an enlightened conscience, but actuated solely by pique, fashion, or convenience? Some are carried about by the shifting tides and variable winds of political opinion and party spirit, others by notions of gentility, and more still by impulses of imagination and taste. It is the loud and bitter lament of a splendid but papistical writer in the Quarterly Review, that a large portion of the members of the Church of England have lost much of their veneration for, and attachment to, the Church as such, and are moved and influenced only by the

weaker and more variable affection for her formularies and her ministers; and have consequently sunk down from the feelings of high churchmen to a level approaching that of dissent. Woeful apostacy! Sad degeneracy! Perhaps there may be found in all denominations too a great a predominance of taste and feeling over judgment and conscience in matters of religion. Observe the influence which a new popular preacher has in large towns and cities over the members of his own denomination, whether established or nonconformist. This fresh wonder, like the new moon, sets the whole ocean in movement by the attraction of his genius, always causing a high tide to follow upon his appearance, and leaving the opposite shores proportionably deserted. Old and tried clergymen and pastors are forsaken for this youth of much rhetoric and a fine voice: and that not by young females only, but by those whom the veteran minister was the instrument of converting from the error of their ways, and in labouring for whose spiritual edification he has brought on himself the increasing infirmities of a premature old age. It does indeed appear to me, and has appeared to others, that religion has lost something of its steadiness, its seriousness and its dignity, and has acquired too much of the flutter and vanity of a thing of fashion and excitement. I do not want the chain of caste to bind men to their hereditary opinions; nor family prejudice to make them ecclesiastical fixtures in the places of their fathers; nor the gloom of superstition to invest them with the air and mien of spectral forms; but a profession of religion is the most solemn, though most joyful, thing on earth, and ought to be sustained in all its exercises and

habits, with an appropriate seriousness, dignity and conscientiousness.

Such then is my estimate of the state of professors in the present day. I have been anxious neither to charge them with faults of which they are not guilty, nor to extenuate such as truly belong to them: and neither to deny nor to flatter their excellences. I see many things to lament, and most of all, the bitter animosity which exists between the two great bodies of Protestants in this kingdom, or at any rate in one of them towards the other; but I see much to inspire me with gratitude for the present, and hope for the future. I am not one of those who in the signs of the times see nothing but portents, and in the voices of passing events hear nothing but denunciations. Our position is that of nature in early spring, when there may be far more of cold wind, biting frost, and drifting snow, than there was during many hybernal days: but withal, these signs of lingering winter are blended with symptoms of approaching summer. I have pointed out what is wrong with the hope of helping to set it right, and I have adverted to what is good with the design of making it better. I have not uttered the language of querulousness and discontent; for I feel there is no occasion for it. No age that has yet existed makes me regret that I was born in that which is now passing over us. I believe the world is not only growing older, but wiser and better; and that Christ's body, the church, is increasing not only in bulk, but in vigour. Many evils exist, but they will be, I hope, removed or subdued by the Spirit of God accompanying his truth. Nothing will be permitted to hinder the advance of Christ's

kingdom. "Though," says South, "there be a lion, a bull, a venomous serpent, and a fiery scorpion in the Zodiac, yet still the sun holds on his way, goes through them all, brings the year about, covers the fields with verdure, the trees with fruit, and the earth with yellow harvests, finishes his course, shines and is glorious in spite of such opposition." So will it be with the orb of the moral world.

Still, however, as the record of the past is preserved for the improvement of the present, and the memorial of the present is to be kept for the benefit of the future; if in looking back we find virtues in our ancestors which we have not, or which we possess in less degrees, let us add their excellences to our own: and if they are seen to possess faults which we find not in ourselves, let us be thankful for, though not proud of, our superiority. If they excelled us in the devotional, spiritual, and conscientious, and we excel them in the active, liberal, and diffusive; let it be our business, instead of endeavouring to settle which is the more excellent way, to unite them both, which is unquestionably the most excellent one. Let us feed the lamp of zeal which we are holding up amidst a dark world with the oil of piety. Let the light of truth shine forth from hearts burning with the fire of holy love. In the beautiful pyramid of Christian graces which the apostle has raised, he laid the foundation in faith, and placed charity at the apex, as if to remind us that the personal virtues must support the relative ones. As the priests of the Levitical economy hallowed themselves for the work of the Lord in the temple, so must the Christian priesthood, the professors of Christ, sanctify themselves, not by animal sacrifices

and ablutions of water to the purifying of the flesh, but by renewed faith in the Lamb of God, and a new baptism of the Holy Ghost, for the greater work, to which God in his providence has called them in the conversion of the world. We must separate ourselves from the love of the world, to this stupendous achievement, this high and holy service, by more of the life of faith, the power of prayer, and the self-denial of true godliness. A dispensation connected intimately with the scheme of redemption, the moral destinies of the world, and the glories of eternity, is come upon us, and committed to us, and it is to be feared we are not ready for it. We are going forth to our vocation, but it is rather in the feebleness, than in the fulness, of our strength. Never, O never, may we forget that religious societies, however well supplied with funds, are only as the hands and the arms of Sampson were to that wondrous man when he did his mighty deeds; but that it is piety, humble, fervent, spiritual, believing, praying piety, that is as the locks of his strength, which enabled him in the name of God to triumph even in death, over Dagon and his idolatrous worshippers.

CHAPTER VI.

MOTIVES TO THE ATTAINMENT OF HIGH DEGREES OF PIETY.

It is obvious both from the nature of religion and the metaphors employed in the Word of God to describe it, that it may exist in various degrees, just as life may be found in all stages, from the feebleness of approaching death, to the full vigour of glowing health; from the sickly infant, to the vigorous adult. So it is in religion, there may be the bud or the fruit; the dawn or the decline of day; the glimmering twilight and the noontide blaze. All true Christians are really converted, but they are not all equally sanctified. There is an essential difference of nature between the least eminent Christian, and the most excellent worldling, though it is not always perceptible to us. My object in this chapter is to excite the ambition of professors to seek after high attainments in piety. The present race of Christians can scarcely be considered eminent in some things. This has already been touched upon in a previous chapter. Politics and trade have an unhappy tendency to lower the tone of spiritual piety, and even the spirit of enterprise in benevolent and religious institutions, may, without care, call off our attention too much from our own personal religion. The dew of divine grace, and the fine odours of devotional feelings, may be exhaled

from the soul, by the warmth of bustling zeal, as well as by the ardour of secular pursuits, and the fervour of party politics.

Perhaps it may be as well to state, what is meant by eminent piety. Real personal godliness consists of the union of scriptural opinions, spiritual affections, a tender conscience, good morals, and Christian love: eminent piety, therefore, means all these elements united and carried to a high degree of perfection.

A great regard and relish for, evangelical sentiment, is necessary, and a discriminating mind attaching much importance to right opinions, in opposition to that spurious candour and destructive latitudinarianism which think it of little consequence what a man believes, provided he acts well.

With this must be associated strong spiritual affections, or what in common discourse is called spirituality of mind; a prevailing taste for divine and heavenly things; walking with God; living by faith; setting our affections on things above; deadness to the world; proneness to devout meditation; delight in prayer; fondness for the Scriptures; a disposition to retire from company to hold communion with God; ardent love for religious ordinances; enjoyment of the peace that passes understanding, and a frequent experience of the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. This is eminent religion.

It must comprise much laborious and painful mortification of sin in the heart. The New Testament every where supposes the indwelling of sin in believers, and every where enjoins its mortification. There is "still a law in our members warring against the law of our mind, seeking to bring us into captivity to the law

of sin which is in our members." "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that we cannot do the things that we would." Hence, we are called upon "to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts thereof; to mortify the deeds of the body; to strive against sin; to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." He is, therefore, most eminent in religion, who is most engaged in the work of mortification of sin; who deals with his heart as a neat and cleanly woman deals with her house, not enduring that an unclean spot, much less a filthy room, should be found in it. This struggle after universal holiness, inward holiness, perfect holiness, this desire and endeavour after purity of heart, this real and vigorous pursuit after absolute perfection, constitutes eminent religion.

It includes, also, an exquisite tenderness of conscience; a mind that trembles at sin, and shrinks like the apple of the eye from slight offences, as well as greater ones; a holy watchfulness against sins of the tongue, imagination, or heart, as well as of the outward life; and a constant penitential frame for our manifold imperfections.

Nor must I omit to mention as essential to eminent piety, a high-toned morality; a sense of honour; an inflexible integrity, not to be seduced by the greatest temptations, and most flattering prospects.

Liberality for the cause of Christ proportioned to our circumstances is also necessary to exalted religion; a mind so penetrated and filled with a sense of God's love in Christ Jesus to us, as will make us willing to

give freely to the cause of God, of that property which he has first given to us.

Nor is the description complete without mentioning a large portion of that charity which the apostle so beautifully describes in the thirteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians. The spirit of love must be in us, or there is no religion; there must be much of this spirit, or there cannot be eminent religion. This, this, is piety. Love is religion, and the man who is greatly wanting in it, let him have what else he may, is low in personal godliness.

Connected with all this, must be the prevalence of evangelical motive; a constant impulse supplied to the soul from the belief and sense of the love of Christ. The moral excellence of Christianity is not an abstract system of ethics, a mere sense of propriety, leading to a cold and heartless character; it is a constant movement of the heart under the attraction of the cross of Christ. "The love of Christ constraineth us," is the spring and reason of all Christian piety. He is eminent in religion in whose heart Christ dwells by faith; who is rooted and grounded in love; who knows the love of Christ which passes knowledge, and to whom this divine love is as the warmth of spiritual life, the pulsation of the heart, the source of healthful action: who loves his wife, as and because Christ loved him; who forgives his enemy, because Christ forgave him; who is benevolent to others, because Christ was full of grace to him; who lives in all holiness, because Christ died for this purpose in reference to him: this is eminent piety, to be always in sight of the cross, having fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, and being made conformable unto his death; so that we shall truly comprehend the meaning

and feel the force of the apostle's words, "For me to live is Christ."

The union of all these constitutes eminent religion. It is not a great prominence of any one of them, to the neglect of the others; but the combination in tolerably equal proportions of these varied excellences. Symmetry means beauty; and beauty means the union of many good features or parts in due proportions. One good feature, though of surpassing loveliness, if combined with others, which are as much below mediocrity as that is above it, will not make a beautiful or interesting countenance. One striking excellence, if associated with defects and deformities, instead of throwing them into shadow, serves only to render them more conspicuous and more offensive, by the contrast. This applies strictly to religion. A man, though seemingly eminent for spirituality, if low in morality; or if distinguished for liberality, if lukewarm in spiritual affection; or if very upright, and also devotional, yet if of known bad temper, cannot be eminent in religion.

Great and lamentable errors on this subject have prevailed in the Christian world, and it is necessary that they should be rectified. It has been too commonly supposed that spirituality alone, apart from the other things mentioned, constitutes a high degree of religion; and hence many have passed for eminent Christians, simply on the ground of fervid feeling, although perhaps lamentably deficient in tenderness of conscience, a sense of honour, or Christian charity. It is the symmetrical union of all the varieties of Christian excellence that forms moral beauty; the association of high devotion with justice and truth; the character that ascends the

mount to commune with God, and then comes down to reflect the light of the excellent glory in moral virtue; the blending of the dispositions that prepare us for heaven, with those that fit us to adorn our stations and bless our species upon earth. The apostle in speaking of the church, says, "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted with that which every part supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." As far as it can, this may be applied to individual, personal, religion. We must not pay attention to one part of it, and endeavour to carry that to perfection, to the neglect of the other parts, but seek eminence in them all. If it were lawful to make comparisons on such a subject, I should say that mediocrity in all particulars without deficiency in any one of them, is better than great attainments in one to the total neglect of several others. But our obvious duty is to seek after the highest degree of perfection in every particular. The various Christian excellences are too much distributed among many persons, and not all of them enough concentrated in each professor. Sometimes we see an individual generous and public spirited, but austere and tyrannical at home; or else he is wanting in a nice and delicate sense of honour in his commercial transactions; or his personal religion is lukewarm or defective. A second is partaker of a zealous and enlightened attachment to orthodox sentiment, but is too covetous, or too much given to unsubdued temper. A third is upright and honourable as a tradesman, a pattern of all that is just, true, honest, lovely, and of good report, but he is sadly deficient in spirituality of mind

and religious affections. A fourth is spiritual above most, fond of meditation, and much given to prayer; but is at the same time somewhat puffed up with pride, is censorious, and sadly wanting in zeal for the spread of Christ's kingdom in the world. Thus, we find, in looking round on the Christian church, that the various excellences and beauties of the new creature, seem rather shared by many than possessed by each. True it is, that we may conceive it possible that one grace may shine forth in more conspicuous glory in the Christian character than the rest; but still it may be assumed as an indisputable fact, that it is barely possible to have one excellence in great and rare perfection, without the rest being in some measure in considerable strength also: much less is it possible to have one towering virtue, associated with many imperfections of equal strength and stature. Eminence in piety, then, signifies, as I have before said, our having all the parts of the Christian character in considerable strength and in tolerable proportions.

If motives are necessary to urge you to obtain this eminence, how many, and what cogent ones, are at hand. But motives to what? To personal religion? No; you, as professors, have, or are supposed to have, that already: but to eminent religion; to high degrees of piety; to vigorous, fervent and exalted devotion! Consider, then, how the subject is enjoined upon you in the word of God. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and soul, and strength." "Be zealous of good works." "Be filled with the fruits of righteousness." "What manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness." "Be ye perfect, as your Father who is in heaven is perfect."

Astounding idea! To be perfect, not perfect as glorified saints; not as angels, but perfect as God. Oh! this is almost overwhelming; almost enough to throw us into despair!

Eminent piety is the way to happiness. It is peace, and bliss, the sunshine of the breast, the sabbath of the soul, the resting place on which the heart lays down its load of cares, anxieties, and sorrows. There is happiness in faith, but it must be strong faith; happiness in hope, but it must be lively hope; happiness in love, but it must be fervent love. The religion of many professors is useless to them. It does nothing for them. They derive no good from it. They are neither comforted in trouble, rendered grateful in prosperity, nor sustained in anxiety by it. They hear some talk of their joys, and hopes, and seasons of communion with God, but they are strangers to such things; in short, their religion is a mere dead form. In the case of some other professors, their religion is an actual incumbrance, a hindrance to their happiness, rather than a help. They are spoiled for the world, without being fitted for the church. They cannot go to fashionable amusements, and yet they have nothing in the place of them. Their souls dwell in a wilderness, a bleak and cheerless desert, where no pleasant plant grows, not even the deleterious flower of sinful pleasure. The happiness of religion is reserved for those whose piety is sincere, and the higher degrees of its happiness for such as have large measures of holiness. God is the fountain of life; and in his light only can you see light; we must press nearer to him, if we would enjoy him. His dwelling is in the holy mount, and you must ascend to him there, if you would have joy and peace in believing. You have read

the biographies of eminent saints, and sometimes have exclaimed in almost an agony, "Why am I a stranger to their delights?" The answer is easy, "Because you are a stranger to that elevated piety from which their joy sprung." The same measure of faith would have been attended in your case with the same degree of holy joy. You are too worldly, too proud, too irritable, too prone to violate the rule of duty in little things, too careless in your walk; and must grow in grace before you can increase in religious comfort.

The continuance of religion is exceedingly precarious if it be not eminent. In many cases piety is so superficial, feeble, lukewarm, and undecided, that it soon dies away amidst the cares, comforts, and pursuits of life. It has not root, strength, or vitality enough, to resist the influence of the calm, much less the shock of the tempest. It is like a lamp, that needs not a gust of wind to blow it out, but expires in still air, for want of oil to keep it burning. We see many and melancholy exemplifications of this. Young females, who in single life seemed to have religion, have lost it all amidst the cares of a family; many a servant, who in his dependent situation, was a consistent though not an eminent professor, has become a confirmed worldling upon entering into business as a master; many an individual, whose piety was sustained by the aid of quickening and powerful preaching, has relapsed into utter carelessness, when taken away from its influence. In all these instances, religion withered away for want of root. In other cases it has been destroyed, and laid prostrate at once, by a violent attack of temptation, or some sudden change of circumstances. There is, therefore, no safety but in a heart established by grace,

clearness of views, strength of principle, deep rooted conviction, strong affection, high resolve, fixed purpose, and peace that passes understanding, keeping the heart and mind in the fear of God. O what disclosures would days of persecution make, if they were to come again; in such sifting times how many professors, who now excite no suspicion of their sincerity, would be blown away as the chaff! We see this in part exemplified now, by the influence of ordinary troubles upon some of them. In prosperity they are cheerful, regular, and apparently consistent; but see them in adversity, what poor, dispirited, despairing creatures they are! Not a ray of hope reaches their heart; not a smile is on their countenance; every pleasant prospect is vanished, every hope is extinguished, and they are as sad, desolate, and forlorn, as the veriest worldling on earth is in the wreck of his fortune. Would it be thus if they had eminent piety?

And who is it that does honour to religion, raises its credit and reputation in the estimation of the world? Not he whose piety is so feeble, so fluctuating, and attended by so many imperfections, as to leave it quite doubtful whether he can be truly a religious man; who on being named as a church member, excites the astonishment of by-standers, that he should be accounted a Christian; no, the little religion he has, does more harm than if he had none at all. He had better give up the name, for nothing but that remains; and the very name acquires reproach by being associated with so much that is unworthy of it. Such persons had better abandon their profession altogether, if they are resolved not to improve. It is the eminent Christian, the man whose religion makes him remarkable

for his holiness, happiness, and usefulness; whose piety not only proves its own sincerity, but its strength; who is decided, consistent and earnest; this is the man of whom it may be said, "wisdom is justified of her children."

How your usefulness will be increased by eminent piety! Pure zeal is the emanation of true godliness, and in proportion to the strength of the one, will be the fervour of the other. It is the love of Christ constraining us, that will keep us steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Excitement from other causes, impulses from other sources, will subside; it is this, this only, that can supply a constant spring of activity and liberality. This will give permanency and regularity to our efforts, and will be likely to give them success also, by bringing down, through the instrumentality of fervent prayer, the blessing of God on all we do.

And then grace and glory are inseparable; grace is glory begun, and glory is grace completed; grace is the seed, glory is the crop, and in proportion to the seed will certainly be the harvest; for what a man sows that shall he also reap. That there are different degrees of honour and felicity in the heavenly world, is clearly a doctrine of Scripture, and it is proposed there as an incentive to seek after high attainments in godliness. Our future happiness or misery, though the former will be strictly the gift of grace, and the other the award of justice, will unquestionably spring out of the character we attain to in this world. Both heaven and hell will, in a very great degree, consist of something within us; will arise from what we are; in one case from perfect holiness, and in the other from matured sin. External

objects will, of course, enhance the different states of the mind, but the mind will be itself the source of its own misery or bliss. Hence, it is evident, that we are now continually meetening for the one or the other of these conditions; and so close is the connection between grace and glory, that it is probable that not a single act of true piety, not an effort, not a motive, not a feeling, is without its influence upon our eternal state. Every holy desire, volition, word, purpose, or action, carries on the formation of the eternal character; just as every little dot of the painter's pencil contributes to the completeness of the picture. So, on the contrary, every single sin on earth will be an addition to the character and torment of a damned spirit in hell. What a motive, then, is this consideration to exalted piety, to high degrees of religion! All you acquire in this world, is an accumulation going on for the next. This is laying up treasures in heaven, growing rich towards God, and becoming affluent for eternity. The eminent Christian is preparing for some high post in the kingdom of God, and for a station of double honour in the realms of immortality.

O professors, let me with all the earnestness of which I am capable, and which I am able to express, exhort and entreat you to seek after higher attainments in piety than you possess. You are living too low, far too low; beneath, much beneath, your duty, your privileges, your principles, and your profession. Your religion is too much a religion of mere opinions, and forms, and ceremonies; of mere abstinence from gross immorality, coupled with an attendance upon an evangelical ministry. Where, O where, I ask again, as I have done before, do we see the life of God in the soul, the

heavenly mind, the work of faith, the tender conscience, the image of God, the mind of Christ, the impress of eternity? Who have conquered the world by faith? Who have set their affections on things above? Who are making it their great business to prepare for the coming of Christ, and their blessed hope to look for his arrival? Where are the epistles of Christ known and read of all men? Where are his peculiar people? Where the witnesses for God? Where are those to whom we can point and say, Behold the men and women who look not at things seen and temporal, but at things not seen and eternal? Awake, arise, shine; listen to the fearful language of Christ to a Christian church of antiquity, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert either cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Tremble at this awful denunciation, lest it should come upon you.

I wish it to be understood and felt, that those who are not anxious, prayerful, and active to obtain eminent piety, have no right to conclude that they have any religion at all. The very attempt to quiet our minds with the idea that the standard of religion set up in the Bible is too high for us to seek; that very few reach it; that it is not necessary we should attain to it; and that we need not doubt our sincerity because we have never come up to it, is a just cause for suspecting our religion altogether. And yet nothing is more common than this. In very many minds there is a train of reflection similar to the following: "It is true I fall very far short of the mark which is set up in the Word of God, and which is placed before me by my minister;

and tried by that I must give up all pretensions to the Christian character: but then who can reach that height? I do not see any around me who are thus distinguished, and surely they cannot all be wrong! It is sincerity that is required as evidence of piety, not perfection: a little grace is true grace, as well as a great deal: my circumstances are against the possession of eminent piety. I hope I have enough to take me to heaven, and all deficiencies will be made up there: my corruptions, it is true, are strong, and I cannot deny that I give way to them, and indulge them too much; but religion is a conflict, and I cannot expect the victory while I live. Besides, God is merciful, and does not notice many things which are condemned by some rigid professors as wrong. While, therefore, I always admire eminent religion in those whose circumstances allow them to cultivate it, I certainly do not possess it, nor do I think it is necessary to salvation."

The professor who can reason thus, and soothe his fears with such fatal and delusive opiates, is sleeping the sleep of death. He is going to perdition with a lie in his right hand: sliding down into the pit without disturbance, and without alarm. His whole religion, or rather that to which he gives the name, is mere mercenary selfishness: it is something which he has taken up only to quiet his conscience, or to save him from hell. He has not a particle of love to God or holiness in his soul. He would be glad to do without religion altogether if he could, and he is determined to have as little of it as he can. Does the man who loves wealth act thus, and content himself with as little of it as will lift him above absolute want? Does the man who is careful about his health act thus, and be satisfied with

such a measure as will keep him from actual death? Is there a single object of human desire and pursuit as to which men act in this way? No, there is not. In the case of every thing else which is really desired there is the desire and endeavour for much of it, as certainly as there is any desire at all for it. So it is with religion; if it be sincere, we shall be no more content with little of it, than we are in the case of any other thing which we value. An endeavour, therefore, to reconcile the mind to low attainments; and to indulge in covetousness, bad temper, and worldly-mindedness, under the idea that, after all, we have some grace at bottom, enough to take the soul to glory, is a delusion of a most awful kind. Multitudes so deluded are to be found in the christian world. Professors, tremble, for many of you have just cause to do so. Are you setting your aim on high? Have you fixed your eye on perfection, do you desire it, seek after it, and long for it? Rejecting all excuses, disdaining to be satisfied with an average amount of piety, are you toiling up the rugged side of the mount to reach the summit of eminent religion? Is it your great business to be holy in all kinds and all degrees of holiness? Do you consider that holiness is literally your vocation, and are you labouring in it as in your calling? This is the representation which is given to us in the Word of God, as the manner of life for his people.

Begin, then, from the perusal of these pages to seek after higher degrees of personal religion. Be not satisfied with present attainments. Even the apostle Paul resolved to forget the things that were behind, in a desire to press on to greater excellence. And can you be satisfied? Beware, I repeat, of making the perilous

yet too frequent experiment of ascertaining with how little piety you can reach heaven. Those who are seeking just enough religion for this purpose, will find out to their eternal confusion, that they had not enough. The love of God, like the love of money, is never satisfied with what it possesses. Real grace in the soul is ever seeking after increase, and any approach to contentment with what you have, is a proof you have none. You must grow. It is your solemn duty. God demands it, your happiness and your safety require it. It is as much your duty to be eminent christians, as it is that of others. No reason for this applies to them, which does not equally apply to you. A higher degree of holiness is attainable by you. The grace that is necessary for this, is within your reach. You are not to imagine that there is any peculiarity in your case, which forbids the hope of improvement. God's grace is all-sufficient: the Holy Spirit is omnipotent. You are commanded as matter of duty, and invited as matter of privilege, to be eminent in religion. O take up the wish, the purpose, the determination. Make it the object that you must accomplish, the attainment you must secure. Set about it in earnest. Give yourself to reading, to meditation, and prayer. Set apart time, sufficient time, for all the purposes of private devotion; for communion with your own heart, and for communion with God. Resist the encroaching, absorbing, and destructive influence of the world in every form. Consider you have a soul to be saved, a hell to avoid, a heaven to obtain. Your profession cannot do these things for you; rely not upon it; feel as if the work were all to be begun; let there be the same earnestness, the same diligence, the same solicitude, as there were when

you commenced the pursuit of eternal life. Adopt the Bible afresh as the book of books: let nothing supplant that precious volume. One great cause why the piety of this age is so feeble and so languid, is because the Bible has in many cases been swept away by a flood of uninspired publications. The pure milk of the Word has been neglected, or has been so diluted, as to leave but little nourishment in the mixture, and the new born babe, as a matter of course, has remained dwarfish and sickly. Even the biography of the most distinguished saints, which ought to form a part of the Christian's reading, and is eminently calculated to fan the flame of devotion in the soul, ought not to be allowed to displace the Word of God. Again I say, Professors, awake, arise, shine! "To be carnally minded is death; to be spiritually minded is life and peace." "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DUTY OF AVOIDING THE APPEARANCE OF EVIL.

"God hath called us unto holiness." Impressive idea! It is our very vocation to be holy. Holiness was the image of God in which man was created, against which the envy and malignity of Satan were directed, and which he dashed and destroyed, when he found himself unable to reach the divine original. Holiness is the end of all God's dispensations towards his people, whether of Providence, Grace, or Glory. Holiness will constitute the perfection of man's moral nature in heaven; it is the spotless garment in which the seraph ministers before the throne of the Eternal; it is more, for it is the beauty of the Divine Being himself; not so much a separate attribute of his nature, as the perfection of all his attributes. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all;" and from the midst of his excellent glory, he is ever calling to us and saying, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." True religion is conformity to God, and God is holy. Herein Christianity is distinguished from idolatry, and its infinite superiority above the classic paganism of antiquity is demonstrated. Some of the philosophers, especially those of the Stoic sect, delivered many fine sentiments, and even beautiful maxims of a stern and rigid morality, but their ethics

had no connexion with their theology. "The gods of the pagan heaven were little better than men's own evil qualities exalted to the sky, to be thence reflected back upon them, invested with Olympian charms and splendours. A mighty labour of human depravity to confirm its own dominion! It would translate itself to heaven, and usurp divinity, in order to come down from thence with a sanction for man to be wicked." So that while men in christian lands become wicked for want of religion, those that dwell in heathen countries become wicked by religion. The moralist and the priest are in opposition to each other; and the former, if he would succeed in making men better, must caution them against allowing the latter to bring them within the precincts of a temple, or to introduce them to the presence of a God. But it is the excellence and glory of Christianity, that its refined morality is founded upon, and arises from, its pure theology; which contains every possible motive, and every means necessary for holiness. Our great business, then, in this world, is to be made and kept holy. Our whole life is to be one incessant struggle against that moral evil which is all around us, and within us. "We are called," I repeat the expression, "to holiness."

How emphatic, how comprehensive, is the apostolic admonition, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." Some expositors render the expression thus, "Abstain from every sort or kind of evil." In this sense, it is a most important precept. Evils are of various kinds and degrees, and it is a Christian's duty to avoid them all. He must not reconcile himself to any one thing that is contrary to God's Word. He must declare war, and maintain irreconcilable hostility against every sin.

But, probably, the true meaning of the text is the commonly received one, that we are not only to abstain from those things that are really and manifestly evil, but from such as are only doubtfully and in appearance such. We must avoid not only the identical thing itself, but all shows and resemblances of it.

1. Professors should abstain from the smallest beginnings of evil, the first buddings of sin: those things which would not be noticed in others, and are made apparent, like faint stains upon cambric, only by the white ground of their profession; and which, after all, in the estimation of many, are so small and insignificant, as to be rather appearances, than realities. Little sins lead on to greater ones; and if they did not, and were not to be feared on account of what they may lead to, should be shunned for their own sakes. A female vain of her beauty, is annoyed not only by sores upon her countenance, but by freckles. A professor is not to be vain of the beauty of holiness, but still he is to be watchful of it, and must therefore avoid the smallest disfigurement of it by sin.

2. We must not venture to the extreme verge of what is good, nor try how near we can come to evil, without actually committing it. The boundary, as I have elsewhere remarked, between right and wrong, is an invisible line, which many rash adventurers have passed, ere they were aware they were approaching it. Besides, though it may be quite perceptible, and avoided by those who are near, yet persons who are close to it may appear to others, who look from a distance, to be gone over it. It is a most dangerous thing for ourselves, to go as near to sin as we can without committing it; and as to observers, there are many to whom, in such

a position, we are sure to seem to be committing it. All sober, serious, conscientious, and considerate Christians, try to keep far within the territory of holiness, being aware that the border country is generally disputed ground, and much infested by marauders from the enemy's land, who are lying in ambush to make captives of those who adventure beyond the line of their defence. But there are many of an opposite description, who have so little circumspection and tenderness of conscience, that if they can but keep themselves from that which is intrinsically and notoriously evil, they make no scruple of venturing upon the borders and edges of sin.

3. We must take care not to "let our good be evil spoken of:" for even virtues may be sometimes so exercised, or exercised in conjunction with such circumstances, as to give them the appearance of evil. There is, in some instances, as great a want of judgment in the doing what is good, as there is in others a want of conscience in doing what is evil, and, in the end, with much the same result; I mean the disparagement of religion. It is truly painful to think how much of real and even eminent holiness has in some cases, been witnessed, not only without admiration, but with disgust; and has been spoken of rather with contempt than applause, merely in consequence of the incrustations of folly by which it has been disfigured. A professor, eminent for her earnest solicitude about her soul, in her anxiety to grow in grace, and keep up the vitality of religion, will perhaps neglect all the duties of her household, and leave a sick child to servants, in order to attend a prayer meeting or a sermon. A second, in his zeal for the cause of Christ, will give for its support

that property which belongs to his creditors. A third, in his hatred of sin, will be guilty of all kinds of rudeness in reproving transgressors. Mercy sometimes degenerates into pernicious weakness, justice into harshness, spirituality into cant, humility into meanness, devotion into superstition, and a tender conscience into a diseased one. If it be injurious, and most injurious it is, to the cause of holiness, to give the names of virtues to vices, and thus reconcile men to bad things by the potent spell of good words, it is not much less so, perhaps, to disgust men against what is really good, by affixing to it the appearance of what is evil. Names have a mighty influence in human affairs. Hence the woe denounced against those "who call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"

4. This rule commands us to abstain from what appears to ourselves of doubtful propriety. There are very many things, of which the sinfulness is so manifest, which have so much of the palpable substance as well as the appearance of evil, that they are shunned without a moment's hesitation, by every one who has the least regard to the authority of God. But there are others, the criminality of which is not so clear, and of which, therefore, even a good man may stand in doubt. We oftentimes meet with such things, and are in much and painful indecision whether we may carefully venture upon them or not. This is the state of mind, which has been called a "doubting conscience." The apostle has laid down rules for guiding us safely out of this dilemma, and which are sufficiently plain for all ordinary cases. "He that doubteth is damned (condemned)

if he eat, for whatsoever is not of faith (that is, which a man does not believe he may lawfully do) is sin." Doubts about the propriety of an action are strong presumptive evidence that it is unlawful, for they must have their origin in the perception of some appearance of evil. Still there are persons of such a timid and nervous constitution, of such a physical incapability of coming to any conclusion, that if they never acted till they had got rid of all doubts, they would never act at all. The following rules may, perhaps, be of service to such persons, and indeed to all.

When in the proposed action, all the doubts lie on one side, there need be no hesitation.

When one action will promote our interest, and the other oppose it, the probability is, that the way of duty lies in the course which is disadvantageous to us.

It is always best, in doubtful cases, to take the safer side; that which, as far as we can judge, will involve least risk of our own reputation, and of the comfort and well-being of others.

It is well, in some difficult cases, to suppose the affair to belong to somebody else, and to look at it, as far as we can, as theirs; and then ask ourselves the question, "How should I judge for them?" and vice versa, to suppose them looking upon us, and to say, "What will be their opinion how I ought to act?"

In all cases we should consult the Word of God: not to find passages which will favour that side of the question to which we are already inclined; but with a desire to know His will, and with fervent prayer to Him for direction.

If, after all, we are still in doubt, we may ask the opinion and advice of some discreet Christian friend or

friends, on whose judgment and conscientious impartiality we can rely.

When we have thus endeavoured to know what is right, we are to proceed to action, and not allow ourselves to be checked, interrupted, or distressed by any speculative doubts, or by the fears and misgivings of a sensitive or morbid imagination. We must be led by our judgment, and, in some cases, against the doubts and fears that arise from other sources. There is frequently an apprehensiveness which makes some persons pause and hesitate, and almost resolve to turn back, even when their judgment urges them on; just like that groundless fear which makes a timid traveller doubt and feel ready to return, although the finger-post over his head, and the mile-stone by the way side, tell him he is right. A really sincere desire to know and do the will of God at all risks and all costs, will rarely leave a person in much doubt as to what is right to be done. God has promised to guide the meek in judgment, and to shew them his way. As a general principle, it holds good, that what appears to be evil is evil, and must be abstained from. We must not go on against the convictions of our judgment, or even its well grounded fears. When conscience meets us in the path we are going, striding across the road, as did the angel to resist the progress of Balaam, we must not resolve to force a passage, and continue our course.

Perhaps I may here mention with effect some of the subjects which are most commonly the occasion of doubts to professing Christians.

The propriety of engaging in the tricks, artifices, and deceptions in trade, which are carried on to such an extent in this day, and which being so general, are

supposed on that account to be lawful. But no prevalence of that which is deceptive or dishonest, can make it right for a Christian to do such things. More on this subject hereafter.

The support of their families by a trade partially carried on upon the Sabbath-day, is a case of casuistry with some: on the one hand it is their duty to keep holy the Sabbath day, and on the other equally so, to provide for their families. In this case let them follow what is right, and trust God with their families.

Owning property in public undertakings, that break the Sabbath; such as railroads, stage coaches, and canals. Why should this be doubtful? Is it not a violation of the sabbath, and is not this sinful? I know one professor who devotes all he gets by this means, that is one seventh part of his profits, to religious purposes. But is not this serving God with the wages of iniquity? He ought to dispose of such property, for he is a partaker of the sin of the company, as long as his capital helps to carry on the concern.

Inordinate speculation in trade, whereby other persons' property is put in jeopardy, often and justly raises doubts. Many a tradesman fears the consequences of a speculation, and knows if it fails, he shall bring discredit on religion. Then if he persist he is condemned.

Oratorios of sacred music may be mentioned. No subject has raised more doubts in the mind of professors than this, and perhaps there are very few christians who attend such performances, without some qualms of conscience about their propriety. Why then do they go? Ought not the very fact of so large a portion of the christian church condemning them, and especially the more serious and spiritual part of it, combined with the

fact of their own doubts, to lead them to abstain? It is surprising that any one, who regards the apostle's declaration Rom. xiv. 23, as a rule of our conduct, can determine to enjoy this gratification, in spite of his own misgiving fears and disturbing doubts.

Large or expensive parties, in which the sole or main object is to give a grand entertainment, or to keep up fashionable intercourse, raises doubts. Well may professors doubt whether this is such a use of time and money, such a kind of intercourse as God approves. Look at the starving poor at home, and the perishing heathen abroad, and see if you will ever go to one of these parties again, or have one at your own house. Attend to your doubts, and follow the simplicity and economy which the Word of God requires, and your conscience approves.

Compliance with the extravagant fashions of the day, is another thing which often raises doubts in the minds of christians. "Am I not going too far," says many a christian female, "in this gaiety of dress, this costliness of jewellery, this splendour of ornament? Is it not unbecoming in one who professes godliness?" Indeed you are going too far, if ever there is such a surmise as this in your head. You may be quite sure your doubts are well founded if you have any. And so are those of the christian who has the same questionings concerning his equipage, his furniture, expensive dinners, and late hours. He must moderate his expenses and his gaiety, or he is condemned.

Intermarriages of christians with unconverted persons may well raise doubts in the minds of the former. Even if they were not forbidden by Scripture, are they not condemned by reason and conscience? What chris-

tian ever yet did so, without some doubt. See that christian who is about to form such a connexion, doubting all the way whether it is right, trying to pray down his conscience, under the pretext of praying for light, and yet pressing on. Is he not condemning himself?

Defrauding the revenue is practised sometimes without a clear conviction of its sinfulness, and yet some doubt of its propriety. It is robbery, and nothing else. So says the apostle.

Christian parents are not quite satisfied about the practice of sending their children to a dancing-master, and yet they do it, and doubt all the while. They fit them to go to balls, and then tell them they are not to go; qualify them for an amusement, and then keep them from it; give them a taste for a gratification, and then deny it to them.

Such are some of the more prevailing subjects of doubts to professing christians. There are multitudes besides, arising out of peculiar circumstances and situations which cannot be enumerated. These, however, are enough. Let every professor beware how he acts in reference to such matters, and not bring himself under condemnation by acting in opposition to his own conscientious doubts and scruples.

A question will, perhaps, arise in the minds of some, to the effect, "Are we bound, in all cases, to follow the dictates of conscience? If so, as conscience is often misinformed and erroneous, we may sometimes do that conscientiously which is evil." True it is, as Christ foretold his disciples, many have thought they did God service when they persecuted and murdered his saints. And the apostle tells us, that in his unbelieving state,

he verily thought he ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth; and yet, notwithstanding he did it ignorantly, at the dictate of an erroneous conscience, he calls himself, on that account, "the chief of sinners." It is not to be doubted that others do many evil things, and yet act conscientiously therein. How, then, are we to judge? If we say that conscience is not to be followed in all things, we depose this internal monitor from his throne, and affirm that we are not always bound to do that which we believe to be right; while if we say we always are to follow conscience, we seem to prove, that some do right in sinning against God, because they do it conscientiously.

It will help us out of this difficulty, to consider what conscience is. It is that power which the mind possesses of judging its own actions, by comparing them with some acknowledged rule of conduct, and of approving or condemning them according as they agree or disagree with it; together with that susceptibility of self-approbation or remorse, which follows the verdict. Conscience is not the rule of action, but the faculty of judging ourselves by a rule. This rule is the Word of God. When, therefore, the question is asked, "What is right?" I answer, not what conscience, but what the Scriptures, declare to be so. Still, however, the question returns, ought we not to do that which we believe is enjoined upon us by the Word of God? I answer, yes; but then we ought also to form a right judgment of the Word itself. We are responsible for our opinions. Our duty, therefore, may be thus stated: our conscience must be first directed by the rule of Scripture, and then our lives guided by our conscience. It is certainly true, that if we act in opposition to our conscience, we sin;

and no less true, that we sin if our conscience is opposed to the Word of God. We hence see the necessity of searching the Scriptures with trembling awe, simplicity of mind, and earnest prayer to God. And we may rest assured that whatever we do which is condemned by this infallible rule, will be considered and treated by God as sinful, notwithstanding it has been done at the dictate of conscience; for the error of the judgment must have originated in something wrong in the heart, some deficiency of caution in examination, or some prejudice or selfish end we wished to serve, by which evidence was resisted, and a wrong conclusion drawn.

5. We ought to abstain from what appears to be evil to others. Here, of course, some exceptions must be made.

If any thing good in itself, should appear evil to others, we are not on this account to avoid it. The whole Christian religion appeared evil in the eyes of the Pagans among whom it was first propagated, and was persecuted by them as such. Protestantism appears evil in the eyes of Papists; Nonconformity appears evil in the eyes of high Churchmen; and spiritual piety appears evil in the eyes of worldly-minded people to this day. In all cases of this kind, and in whatever is our duty to God, we must disregard the opinion of the world, and do what is right. To all who would turn us from the path of duty, we must give the apostle's reply, "Whether it be right to obey men rather than God, judge ye." We must not venture upon a scandal to the church, to avoid a scandal to the world. It would be a most preposterous kind of charity to please men by disobeying God. Though all the world should utter its howl against the strictness of our religion, and demand

a relaxation of it, we must not gratify their humour, nor seek to win them, by relaxing the least part of that severity which the law of God and our own conscience require of us.

If the strictness of our religion should, as it may sometimes, accidentally prove an occasion of sin to our neighbour, we are not even on that account to abate it. There is no doubt that fervent and consistent piety does oftentimes excite not only the ridicule, but the rage and malice of the wicked. It has not unfrequently happened, that they have been provoked into a truly diabolical spirit, and have been irritated by the religion of their friends into greater lengths of wickedness, till those very friends have been ready to conceal or give up much of their religion, under the idea of preventing the wickedness it seemed to occasion. But this is wrong. Our Lord was a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to the Jews; some were scandalised at his doctrine, as a despiser of the law of Moses; others at his conduct, as if he were a glutton and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, and a sabbath-breaker; but yet for all these calumnies, he altered nothing in his teaching or in his conduct, but amidst all their clamours still went on preaching and doing as he did before. Those that are his disciples must also go on in their course of spiritual religion, although they should perceive evil men on that account to wax worse and worse in their hatred of God and his people. Much spiritual discretion, I admit, is required not to offend unnecessarily, by adding to our religion that which God has not commanded; by performing religious duties out of place and season; by the rigid maintenance of an unprescribed precision; and especially by needlessly

obtruding our piety in a way that looks like ostentation and parade. But all sacrifice of principle, and violation of conscience; all giving up acknowledged duty for the sake of preventing the outbreaks of wickedness, softening prejudice, and conciliating good-will, is doing evil ourselves, to keep others from doing it.

Nor must we sacrifice our principles, and act in opposition to our conscience, even to please the church of Christ. We must separate from what we deem to be an unscriptural communion, and abstain from what we consider a sinful practice, although we incur the condemnation of many professors of religion, or even of the majority of them. Separation from our brethren without a cause, and opposition to them without sufficient reason, are evil, as disturbing without grounds the unity and peace of the church; but then such separation and opposition are strictly proper where there is ground and reason for them.

"If that appear a duty to us," says Bishop Hopkins, a former prelate of the Irish church, "that hath an appearance of evil to the generality of the most sober-minded and serious Christians, why now this should not presently sway our consciences, yet it should engage us to make a strict search and enquiry, whether it be our duty or not; if it be that which is contrary to the opinion and practice of holy and pious Christians, it ought to have this authority with us, to put us to a stand, and to make us examine whether that we account a duty, be a duty or not. As, for instance, some among us at this day are persuaded that they ought to worship God one way, and some another; and what appears to be a duty to one, hath the appearance of evil in it to another. Why, now, follow neither of these because it is their judgment and practice; but yet if thy persuasion be contrary to the persuasion of the most pious and sober-minded Christians, this ought so far to prevail as to make men suspect lest they are mistaken, and to put them upon diligent enquiry and an important search into their grounds and arguments: but after all, still follow that which you are convinced in your own conscience is your duty, how evil soever it may appear to others, one way or another."

These remarks must commend themselves by their candour as well as truth, to every honest mind, and had they been acted upon by the bulk of professing Christians in every age, would have spared the ecclesiastical historian the trouble of recording the thousand angry controversies and horrid persecutions, which have disfigured his pages, and disgraced the various parties which, for the time, have gained the ascendant in Christendom. Schism and persecution would never have existed, though many separations might still have taken place; but the seceders would have acted cautiously and conscientiously, while those from whom they retired, perceiving upon what motives they acted, would have reverenced the principle, however they may have lamented the act, and neither attempted to crush them with the arm of power, nor to brand them with the charge of schism.

The injunction to avoid the appearance of evil out of regard to the feelings of others, relates to things indifferent, or in other words, to the enjoyment of our Christian liberty. Amidst the infinite diversity of human opinion, it is to be looked for, that some things of a perfectly neutral character, which may be done, or not done, without blame in either case, will appear evil to some; and therefore, it is both matter of charity and duty in a Christian to abstain from them. The manner in which we are to use our liberty in things indifferent is stated at length in 1 Cor. viii. A question had arisen in the primitive church about the lawfulness of eating meat that had been offered to idols, and of attending the feasts that were held in the heathen temples in honour of the gods. Some of the primitive professors reasoned thus, "I believe the idol to be a

mere nonentity, and therefore can not only eat the flesh of animals that have been offered in sacrifice to him, but I can even go to his feast; for the so called deity is in my esteem a mere name." "But," says the apostle, "take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak. For if any see thee which hast knowledge, sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him that is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols: and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" Now, observe the apostle's own noble, charitable, and self-denying resolution in reference to this matter: "Wherefore if meat make my brother to offend, (i. e. if my example lead him to sin,) I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." The same reasoning is applied to a similar case stated in Rom. xiv, and the same conclusion is come to: "Let us follow after the things that make for peace, and things whereby one may edify another." "We then that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. Even as Christ pleased not himself." This, then, is the law of Christian liberty in things indifferent. When we do those things which we know to be lawful, yet still not obligatory, but which others think to be sinful, we do not act charitably: such things should therefore be avoided; to do them is not an act of duty, for they are confessedly indifferent, and to leave them undone is not an act of sin, while the doing of them, in such circumstances, is attended with many disadvantages. Your own piety is brought into suspicion. Others may be

unnecessarily grieved, and the communion of saints be interrupted, and some may be led by your example to do the same things in opposition to their conscience, and even to go much further in what is wrong.

Still, this deference to the opinions of others has its limits, nor does it, in any case, forbid the attempt to remove their scruples by argument and persuasion. We are not obliged to consult the whims and caprices of every ignorant or fastidious individual who chooses to take exception to our conduct; nor to submit to the unreasonable and impertinent interference of every one who assumes a right to call us to account; much less to solicit the opinions of our neighbours on all occasions, for this would be endless and ridiculous: but still a man who is regardful (as every man ought to be,) of his own christian reputation, the credit of religion, and the comfort, especially the safety, of his neighbour, will often say to himself, in reference to a particular action, or course of actions, "Well, although I could do this with a clear conscience, because I believe it is quite lawful; yet, as I am not obliged to do it, and I know it is thought to be wrong by others, I will abstain from it, lest I injure my religious profession in their estimation, or lead them, by my example, to do the same thing, in opposition to their conscience." Many a professor has injured, if not ruined his reputation for ever, in the estimation of some persons, by actions which appeared quite lawful in his own eyes, and perhaps were really so, but were not thought so by those who observed him. Their decision was contrary to charity; but his conduct was no less contrary to prudence. Reputation is a thing which no man may trifle with, but every one must watch with sleepless and jealous vigilance; and it

is assailable from so many quarters, and wounded by such small and seemingly contemptible weapons, that we must never be off our guard. It is not enough to do what we know to be right, but we must ever be studious to avoid what others imagine to be evil. We must be not only as harmless as doves, but as wise as serpents. It is our duty, in some cases, to yield to the ignorance we cannot enlighten, and to give way to the prejudice we cannot convince. We must never, I allow, carry our candour so far as to give up principle to our own harm, or to comply with other persons' prejudices to our neighbour's harm; but when we can give way, without the risk of injury to ourselves or our neighbour, and with the probability of good to both, an obstinate attachment to our own opinion should not prompt us to stand out. Great sacrifice of feeling, and considerable self-denial, will sometimes be necessary in acting upon this plan; but what is religion but one continued course of self-denial? Taking up the cross is the condition on which alone we can be accepted as disciples of Christ. It may, perhaps, occasionally inflict a wound upon our pride, make a deduction from our self-importance, and be felt as an abridgment of our independence, to make this concession to weakness and fastidiousness, but it is due alike to ourselves, to our neighbour, and to God. It is the law of religion; and, after all, is the perfection of human character, which consists of the admixture, in due proportions, of the opposite elements of independence and complaisance. Sin, in any form, and in any degree, is so evil, and should be felt by the Christian to be so hateful and disgraceful, that he should determine to stand clear of it, and be acquitted, not only in the court

of conscience and of God, but at the bar of every human being upon earth. His religious character, as a professor, should be as dear to him, and an object of as much care, as her reputation is to a female who is not satisfied with knowing that she has committed no violation of chastity, but would not be suspected of it by a single individual in the world.

Professors, consider this clear and comprehensive rule of conduct. It is not enough not to do evil, but we must not even seem to do it; we must avoid the first for the sake of conscience, and the second for the sake of reputation; the first for our own sake, the second for our neighbour's sake; and both for God's sake. It is not enough to ask concerning an action, whether it is lawful, but we must enquire whether it is seemly; nor must we say, "Prove that it is evil, and I will abstain from it;" but, "If it has the shadow, not the substance, but the mere show of evil, I will avoid it." And if we are to avoid the resemblance of evil, how much more evil itself: if what only some men think to be sin, how much more what all men know to be such! And while we are to abstain from the likeness of evil, we are not to be content with the mere likeness of good: putting on the appearance of evil may sink us to perdition, but the mere shadow of good will never lead us to heaven.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD.

THERE is such a precept as this in the New Testament, "Be not conformed to this world." It is unrepealed, and in full force; and is as binding now as it was in the days of the apostles. There may exist difficulties in the way of ascertaining its meaning, its applicability, and its limits, but it has a meaning. Christians, and even expositors of Scripture, may differ in their opinions of its import, but still it is a rule of Christian conduct. There are passages similar to it in other parts of the Word of God; such as the following, to which the reader is earnestly requested to turn: 1 John ii, 15, 16; Matthew vi, 24; Gal. i, 10; James iv, 4. To what does the rule apply? Not merely to actual vice: immorality is forbidden in other places where its acts are enumerated and branded: nor on the other hand, can it intend to set the Christian in all things in direct contrariety to the world. It is not a command to useless and unmeaning singularity, for the sake of singularity. The world is sometimes and in some things right; and in all that is kind, courteous, polite, and honourable; in all the innocent usages of society; in all the pure tastes and lawful pursuits of our neighbours, we may be conformed to the world. But there are many things which

occupy a kind of middle place between these extremes; they are not absolutely immoral, nor are they innocent, pure, or lawful, for a Christian. They are sinful, but yet not what are usually denominated vicious; and some of them are things lawful in their nature, and made wrong only by excess. They are matters which a man may carry on, and yet not lose his reputation with the multitude, even as a professor; and yet they are forbidden. It will help us, if we turn back and consider what a profession of religion implies; and it is, that we take the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, Lord, and Example: that we are supremely intent upon the salvation of our souls as the great end and object of existence; and make the Word of God the rule of our conduct. In these things we are different from the world around us; this, in fact, constitutes the difference between us and them. We acknowledge ourselves to be a peculiar people, and this separation is visibly maintained by our entire submission to the laws of Christ. We say to all around us, "Whatever you seek, I am seeking salvation; whatever rules of conduct you observe, I obey the laws of Christ as laid down in the New Testament. I am governed by these laws in all things; and I cannot allow you to obtrude upon me your rules of action. I am determined in what is right or wrong, not by the laws of honour, fashion, or ambition, but by the commands of Christ."

"Now such is really the import of a Christian profession, and therefore conformity to the world must be tried by this and this alone. The member of a community or of a family, situated in the midst of other states or families, must be governed by the laws of his own community, and must not allow the laws of these other states or families to be obtruded upon him, but must obey his own. So the Christian church is a community situated in the midst of the

world, and has laws of its own, which it must obey, and not allow the world to impose upon it their maxims, customs, and rules of action. It is not to allow a foreign jurisdiction to come in and modify and relax its code, under the pretext that it is too rigid or severe: too much in opposition to the systems that prevail around."

A professor, as long as he is such, must obey the laws of Christ's kingdom, and if he will not, he should retire. The church is Christ's community, peculiar in its nature, different from all others, being a strictly spiritual kinddom, which is not of this world: it is peculiar in its design, being intended to shew forth the glory of God in its present sanctification and eternal salvation through Christ. It must keep up, not let down its singularity; it must maintain its peculiarity of nature and design as a holy, heavenly body, and not do any thing to soften it down, and blend itself with the kingdoms of this world. All attempts, on the part of its members, to accommodate it to the community by which it is surrounded, is an encroachment on the authority of its Head, an incipient alteration of its nature, and a frustration of its designs.

You are now prepared to see what conformity to the world is forbidden to a professing Christian.

1. A conformity of spirit: and what is the spirit of the world? It is described by the apostle, where he says, "They mind earthly things." This is a concise, emphatic, and accurate description of a worldly man; his supreme, yea, exclusive desire, aim, and purpose, is to get as much, and enjoy as much, of the world as he can. He thinks of nothing else, and wishes for nothing else. His hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, desires and dislikes, are all of the earth, earthly. This is set forth, in another form, by the Psalmist, "There be many that say, who will show us any good?" What an emphatic

description of a worldly mind, of the exclusive regard to, and wish for, earthly possessions and enjoyment! We have still another representation of it in the rich man in the parable, who, upon the increase of his wealth, is made to say, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." This, then, is a worldly spirit, the making the world the highest object of pursuit, and the chief source of enjoyment. This shews itself in various ways; in the love of pleasure in one; in avarice in another; ambition in a third; exclusive delight in home in a fourth. In proportion as a Christian partakes of it, he is worldly-minded. If he appear like one whose supreme aim is to be rich and happy on earth: if he appear to be continually intent on increasing his wealth and multiplying his comforts; if he look like a man who is entirely occupied in enjoying himself here; no matter how remote he may be from covetousness, or ambition, or sensuality, no matter how pure and innocent his tastes may be, he is a worldly-minded man. It is the intention of Christ's kingdom to exhibit a community who live by faith; whose delight is in God; whose joy and peace come from believing; who are not so much seeking to be happy now, as preparing to be happy hereafter. Just in so far as it appears that a Christian is more anxious about his body than his soul; earth than heaven; time than eternity; temporal possessions than eternal salvation; and just in so far as he seems to derive his happiness from things of sense, rather than things of faith, he is conforming to the world; for the spirit of the world is an earthly spirit.

2. Our nonconformity to the world must include in it, a stern refusal to adopt those corrupt principles,

or rather that want of principle, on which a great part of the modern system of trade is conducted. I dwell on this subject, with a repetition that many will dislike, because of its great importance and necessity. We are commanded to follow whatsoever things are true, just, honest, lovely and of good report; and we are to do nothing that is contrary to this rule. This is the Christian law of trade: this is the New Testament system of commercial morality, from which we may not depart. In reply to all this, it is said by many professors, that if they do not, in some degree, conform to the practices of others, in the manner of conducting business, although these practices cannot be justified on the ground of Scripture, they cannot live. Then, I say, they ought not, in their meaning of the phrase, to live. For what does it mean? Not that they cannot subsist, but that they cannot live so comfortably; cannot have so good a house, such elegant furniture, and such luxurious diet. What says Christ? "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands, to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched." "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." There was an age of the church, when its members were required to burn a little incense to the statue of the gods or the emperors, and upon non-compliance with the command, were hurried off to be torn to pieces by lions in the amphitheatre. Upon that single act, because it was regarded as a test of Christian character and influence, depended not only their property or liberty, but their life; and myriads sacrificed their lives rather than conform. What is now the ordeal? What is now the trial of

integrity? Not an act of homage to Jupiter or Trajan: but bowing the knee and burning incense to Mammon! And shall there be no martyrs for christian morality, even as there were once martyrs for christian doctrine? If the early Christians could not serve God and Jupiter, shall we try to serve God and Mammon? If they hesitated not to sacrifice their lives for their profession, shall we think it hard to give up a portion of our gains? Trade is the trial of the church in the present day, and fearful are the disclosures which it makes. Other ages, besides our own, have been, in some measure, exposed to this trial. "The disciples of Wycliffe," said the Popish Inquisitor, Reinher, "are men of a serious, modest deportment, avoiding all ostentation in dress, mixing little with the world. They maintain themselves wholly by their own labour, and utterly despise wealth, being content with bare necessaries. They follow no traffic, because it is attended with so much lying, swearing, and cheating. They are chaste and temperate, are never seen in taverns, or amused by the trifling gaieties of life." To go out, or keep out, of business, however, in order to avoid its snares, is not required of christians: but it is evidently their duty to avoid all ways of transacting it, that are contrary to the rules of the Word of God, the morality of which does not fluctuate with the customs of men, and the manners of the age. If we cannot get any thing more than bread and water, without lying and fraud, we must be content even with this hard fare.

I cannot forebear to transcribe from Dr. Chalmers' admirable discourses on "The Application of Christianity to the commercial and ordinary Affairs of Life," the following passages, if it be only to find an opportu-

nity of urgently recommending to christian tradesmen, the perusal of this incomparable volume. Speaking of that class of virtues which are usually styled the moralities of social life, in distinction from those of a more strictly pious kind, he says,

"On this very subject there is a tendency to delusion on the part of the disciples of the faith. They need to be reminded of the solemn and indispensable religiousness of the second class of virtues. They must not expend all their warmth on the high and peculiar doctrines of the New Testament, while they offer a cold and reluctant admission to the practical duties of the New Testament. The apostle has bound the one to the other by the tie of immediate connexion. (Ephes. iv, 22–28.) We altogether mistake the transforming influence which the faith of the gospel brings along with it, if we think that uprightness of character does not emerge at the same time with godliness of character. Let, therefore, every pretender to Christianity vindicate this assertion by his own personal history in the world. Let him not lay his godliness aside when he has done with the morning devotion of his family: but carry it abroad with him and make it his companion and guide through the whole business of the day; always bearing in his heart the sentiment, that 'thou God seest me'; and remembering that there is not one hour that can flow, or one occasion that can cast up, where his law is not present with some imperious exaction or other. It is false that the principle of christian sanctification possesses no influence over the familiarities of civil and ordinary life. It is altogether false, that godliness is a virtue of such a lofty and monastic order, as to hold its dominion only over the solemnities of worship, or over the solitudes of prayer and spiritual contemplation. If it be substantially a grace within us at all, it will give a direction and a colour to the whole of our path in society. There is not one conceivable transaction among all the manifold varieties of human employment, which it is not fitted to animate by its spirit. There is nothing that meets us, too homely to be beyond the reach of obtaining from its influence the stamp of something celestial. It offers to take the whole man under its ascendancy, and to subordinate all its movements: nor does it hold the place which rightfully belongs to it, till it be vested with a presiding authority over the entire system of human affairs. And, therefore it is, that the preacher is not bringing down Christianity, he is only sending it abroad over the field of its legitimate operation, when he goes with it

to your counting-houses, and there rebukes every selfish inclination that would carry you ever so little within the limits of fraudulency; when he enters into your chambers of agency, and there detects the character of falsehood, which lurks under all the plausibility of your multiplied and excessive charges; when he repairs to the crowded market place, and pronounces of every bargain, over which truth, in all the strictness of Quakerism, has not presided, that it is tainted with evil: when he looks into your shops, and, listening to the contest of argument between him who magnifies an article, and him who pretends to undervalue it, calls it the contest of avarice broken loose from the restraints of integrity: he is not by all this vulgarising religion, or giving it the hue and the character of earthliness. He is only asserting the right and the universality of its sole pre-eminence over man. And, therefore, it is, that if possible to solemnize his hearers to the practice of simplicity and godly sincerity in their dealings, he would try to make the odiousness of sin stand out visibly on every shade and modification of dishonesty; and to assure them that if there be a place in our world, where the subtle evasion, and the dexterous imposition, and the sly but gainful concealment, and the report which misleads an enquirer, and the gloss which tempts the unwary purchaser, are not only currently practised in the walks of merchandise, but when not carried forward to the glare and the liberality of falsehood, are beheld with general connivance; if there be a place where the sense of morality has thus fallen, and all the nicer delicacies of conscience are overborne in the keen and ambitious rivalry of men hastening to be rich, and wholly given over to the idolatrous service of the god of this world, then that is the place, the smoke of whose iniquity rises before Him who sitteth on the throne, in a tide of deepest and most revolting abomination."

In their way of doing business, are not the people of the world actuated by a spirit of supreme and unmixed selfishness, grinding down their servants by over-work and under-wages; wringing from them the greatest amount of labour, at the lowest cost, and wearing them out for the sake of gain? In all their dealings with others, is it not their maxim, the master stroke of all their policy, to buy as cheap, and sell as dear as they can, careless, so as they get a good profit, whether others gain or lose? Do they ever think it worth their while

to ask whether their neighbour can live upon the terms with which they are urgent to make him comply, in order that they may drive a good bargain; and would they not almost laugh in the face of such a poor simpleton, as should talk to them about taking care of their neighbours' interest as well as their own? Nearly the whole system of trade, as now conducted, is based on supreme selfishness, and an utter disregard of the welfare of others. Ungodly men will not deny this; they will unblushingly tell you, that these are the maxims, and that this is the spirit, on which business is done in the world. Now is all this consistent with the love of God and our neighbour, with the spirit of the gospel, and the precepts of the New Testament, or the example of Jesus Christ? You may learn how to answer this, by referring only to one or two passages of Scripture, such for instance as, "Let no man seek his own, but another's wealth." "It is more blessed to give than to receive." "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you." Surely such precepts forbid all hard dealing, all regardlessness of our neighbour's interest. But are not professors as deeply implicated as others in this sin? Do not they adopt the world's maxim, of minding only themselves and caring nothing about the things of their neighbours; leaving irreligious men to see and say, that they are not worse than professors in these respects, and that therefore there can be only a nominal difference between christians and other men? Thus stumbling blocks are thrown in the way of sinners, and their conversion is hindered. Do think what an effect would be produced if all christian tradesmen would carry the love of their neighbours with them into their business, and act honestly, honourably, and

generously, and not according to the loose morality of the world, but the more refined genius of the New Testament. Let all christians do business only for one year on the generous, self-denying, charitable principle of the gospel! "It would shake the world. It would ring louder than thunder. Let the ungodly see them, in every bargain consulting the good of the person they are trading with; seeking not their own wealth only but every man another's wealth; living above the world; setting no value on the world, any further than it can be a means of glorifying God; what do you think would be the effect?" Let the church live thus, and it would cover the world with confusion of face, and overwhelm them with conviction of sin. "Only let them see the church living above the world, and doing business on gospel principles, seeking not their own interests, but the interests of their fellow-men, and infidelity would hide its head, heresy would be driven out of the church, and this charming, blessed spirit of love, would go over the world, like the waves of the sea." And are they not bound to it by their profession? When they entered the church, they solemnly engaged to renounce the world and live for God, to have the mind of Christ, and to regulate all their conduct by that blessed Book which teaches us to deny self, to love our neighbours, and to do good to all men. Around the sacred table, with the symbols of the broken body and shed blood of the Saviour in their hands and mouths, they avouch these to be their principles, and pledge themselves to live according to these maxims, and for these ends. And then what do they do? Go away, and on Monday morning follow the maxims and rules of the men of the world, and become as selfish, as hard, as grinding, as

extortionate in their business, as men of the world. Can such men be saved? Certainly not. Theirs is the way of the ungodly who shall perish. It is not more certain that any infidel or profligate will sink to perdition, than that all professing christians who conform to the spirit of the world will do so. They have double guilt. They are sworn before God to a different course, and when they pursue the business principles of the world, they perjure themselves before the Lord.

3. We are not to conform to the world, by a deference to its opinions on questions of right and wrong. Our opinions must be taken from the Word of God, and must be in accordance with it. That must be our standard of moral sentiment; and we must adopt no other. It must supply us with the reasons, why we approve or condemn any thing. We must ask the question, "What says the Scripture on this subject?" and not "What says the world?" Having ascertained what is the will of God, the law of Christ, we must never want or care about the world's opinion; much less must we desire or in any way seek to bring down the law of Christ to the world's taste or approbation. We must neither do nor avoid a thing simply because the world approves or disapproves of it. In many things we shall coincide with the world, but it must not be for the sake of conciliating its favour or commendation, but because the thing itself is right. There is, in many christians, an excessive and sinful deference to the opinion of worldly people, an obvious wish to stand well with them, to get as near to them as they can, without being actually of their party; a constant aim and endeavour to conciliate their esteem, by humouring them in their prejudices, thinking, as much as possible, as they think, saying as

they say, doing as they do, till the world concludes that these compliant professors are almost won to their party. An anxiety on the part of a christian, to gain the world's good opinion, is a decisive evidence of sinful conformity to it. I do not advocate or recommend rudeness, misanthropy, or vulgarity; a christian may and should be polite, courteous, and refined; not because the world admires those qualities, but because they are right. He should seek to please his neighbour; but only so far as he can please God and his own conscience, and even then not to gain his neighbour's applause, but for his good to edification. He should, of course, be anxious to have the world's testimony to his christian integrity and consistency; but not from a deference to the opinion of the world, but for its welfare, his own reputation, the credit of religion, and the glory of Christ. To give up any one single point of duty, however minute; to alter any one single religious custom or habit; to relax in any one conscientious pursuit, or even to conceal any one peculiarity of our profession, from a dread of the ridicule of the fashionable, the contempt of the wise, or the neglect of the great; and, on the other hand, to do any thing, however trivial or insignificant, which our conscience tells us is sinful, in order to avoid those consequences, is a fearful indication of conformity to the world.

4. We ought not to conform to the world, in such of its social habits, customs, and practices, as are directly or indirectly opposed to the laws of Christ, the spirit of true piety, and the ends of a christian profession.

By this rule, theatrical representations must be condemned, as opposed to the laws of christian morality; as opposed to the spirit of religion and the ends of a

christian profession; and for this same reason, large mixed parties, where religious exercises are excluded to make way for dancing, music, and singing, are unmeet for christians. It is impossible to say exactly how many persons, or what kind of occupations, constitute a party into which a christian may lawfully adventure; I can only state general principles, remind him of the important design of his profession, and then refer him to his judgment and conscience. It is obvious that the tendency of the present day is towards too much company, and company too much mixed, for christian association and edification. The habit of nominal christians indulging or frequenting gay and large parties is a very inappropriate part, and a very bad exemplification of the christian profession. There is little, in such circles, congenial with the spirit of piety: little that is calculated to promote spirituality of mind; little that befits a person set apart to be a follower of the Lamb, a witness for God, and a probationer for heaven. The song, the music, the frivolous discourse, the gay apparel, assort but ill with the spirit of penitence, of prayer, of faith. A professor, in such a situation, can neither get good, nor do good; he not only cannot introduce his religion, but he cannot promote the cause of common humanity; or communicate or receive useful knowledge. Parties are convened for amusement, and every thing besides this is thought out of season, and out of place. It may be difficult to prove, without reference to his profession, that these things are wrong; but he must be tried by his profession. I am speaking of professors. A professor means one who is Christ's; one who desires to obey him, and to promote his glory in the world; one whose desires may be summed up in the supreme wish and aim, to be

assimilated to Christ, to be prepared for eternal glory, and to bring his fellow men to be partakers of the same hope: one who is praying and seeking to be dead to the world, to crucify the flesh, and to get ready for the coming of the Son of God. Is it so, or is it not? If not, what does a profession imply? If it does imply all this, then here is a rule of action, a test of the propriety of a thousand things, which might otherwise be the subject of debate.

"A child can much more easily decide whether a thing be right, by considering if it will be acceptable to the mind of his father, than he could settle its propriety by argument. So a Christian can more easily decide what is right, by considering what will be approved by the mind of Christ, than by reducing it to the touchstone of logical proof. The inhabitant of Sparta could see at once that many things were inconsistent with the design of his republic, and his character as a Spartan, which he could by no means settle in an abstract manner. Whether the aim of the Athenian was proper, or the mild and soft pleasures of the Corinthians, he might not be able to settle by argument, but they would not be the way to train up the Lacedæmonian. So it might become a question of abstract casuistry about a thousand scenes of amusement. It might be easy to argue by the hour in favour of parties of pleasure, and theatres, and ball-rooms, and gaiety, and all the variety of fashionable life, and the mind might 'find no end in wandering mazes lost.' But apply the safe rule before us, and all mist vanishes. Since the beginning of the world, it is to be presumed that no professing christian ever dreamed that he was imitating the example of Jesus Christ, or promoting his own salvation or the salvation of others, or honouring the christian religion, in a theatre, a ball-room, or splendid party of pleasure. And equally clear would be this decision in reference to multitudes of pleasures, which it is useless to specify. Our profession must be the test of what is right or wrong for us; or rather the Word of God, which we profess to make the rule of our conduct."*

This test will decide what is improper in dress, fur-

* "The Rule of Christianity in regard to Conformity to the World," by the Rev. Albert Barnes of Philadelphia; an incomparably excellent discourse, to which I am indebted for many sentiments and expressions of this chapter.

niture, equipage, and social intercourse. All restless ambition to rise above our condition and circumstances, to outshine our equals, and vie with our superiors; all anxious desire and eager endeavour to appear genteel, and to be thought so; all unnecessary extravagance and show, even when our income can sustain it; every thing in short that evinces a disposition to be admired by the world, that looks like the workings of a mind more intent on earth than heaven, more solicitous to be happy here than to prepare for happiness hereafter, is unquestionably a conformity to the world, forbidden by the precepts of God's Word and the principles of our profession. An obvious eagerness to be fashionable in our dress and social habits; a wish to be considered persons of elegant taste; an endeavour to maintain intercourse with the gay; a constant change and heavy expense to keep up the fluctuations of fashion, are all violations of the rule of Christianity. And ought I not to mention, as one of the sinful conformities to the world, of which some professors are guilty, their luxurious and costly dinner and supper parties? A friend of mine, not long after he had been brought out of the gay and fashionable world, described to me with surprise and grief, the splendid set out he had lately witnessed in the house of a christian tradesman. The company were nearly all professors, yet the dinner was of the most varied, expensive, and tasteful character. It is not very surprising, that this man soon after appeared in the gazette.

An anecdote from the life of Mr Scott, the Commentator, may not be out of place here.*

A pungent and fearless writer has given the following summary of reasons why professing christians are not

* It will be found in vol. IX, p. 209.

to follow the fashions of the world in dress and in general habits of pomp and splendour. It is directly at war with the spirit of the gospel, and is minding earthly things; it is contrary to their Christian profession; it is a broad and complete avowal of the spirit of the world; it shows that they do in fact love the world; it proves they love the praise of men, that reputation is their idol; that they do not hold themselves accountable to God for the manner in which they lay out their money; that they do not differ from ungodly sinners; they provoke God to give them up to a worldly spirit; they lead others to follow fashion; they tempt themselves to pride and folly; they confirm the world in a more fierce and hot pursuit of these things; they lay stumbling blocks in the way of the church. They do not consider the great influence their diregarding fashions would have upon the world; how irresistibly it would shame the world and convince them that they were living for another object, for God and eternity, and what an overwhelming testimony it would be in favour of religion.

Some months since I received a letter from a friend, requesting me to write a tract on professors' conformity to the world in some of its social habits, of which the following is an extract:

"I do think that you would help us, if you knew the extent of the evil in and about London, which confirms the statement in the Edinburgh Review, for September, 1831; 'The mammon of unrighteousness seems to inspire most of the godly with terror and aversion: and yet they testify no reluctance to follow the footsteps of the worldly in the way to wealth. They quietly and fearlessly repose amidst the many luxuries which it enables them to procure. We see their houses furnished in every way to gratify the lust of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life; and their tables covered with the same luxurious viands that are in ordinary use with the men of the world. This self-indulgence, and worldly-conformity,

and vain glory, although at variance with the spirit and principles of the gospel, seem to find as much favour in their eyes as with other people.' Thus do we give occasion for our enemies to triumph! The church and the world have formed a most unnatural and unholy league, and the grand stratagem of the Devil seems now to be, to break down the line of demarcation between them. I assure you, you can form no conception of the evil as it exists among our professors; so that in addition to the irreligious and worldly customs, our young people are being ruined by the later than even midnight hours, before they are permitted to return home. I cannot tell you how grieved I was last winter, when my dear boys entered my house between two and three o'clock one morning from the house of one of our most pious members, and met my weeping and affectionate remonstrance with, 'Really, papa, we are thoroughly ashamed of ourselves: but what could we do, we left before any other person, and all are members either at ——— or at ———.' My heart sinks within me when I allude to these things."

This is an affecting view of the social habits of modern professors; and it does not apply exclusively to those of the metropolis, nor to such as belong to any one section of the christian church; the same practices prevail in the country, among professing church people as well as dissenters. I could tell sad tales of each body; I know this to be the grief of pious clergymen, as well as of dissenting ministers.

While on the subject of entertainments, I will allude to the practice of ministers and christians dining together at inns, after public religious services. This cannot be altogether avoided, I am aware, as they naturally wish to be together, and it is not always possible to obtain a private house, or even vestry, large enough to contain them. But it is desirable that it should be otherwise arranged; and where it cannot, the greatest care should be taken, to exclude all unnecessary luxuriousness, and especially all unsuitable practices. I have observed, I think, a manifest improvement in this respect. I have heard of, and formerly participated in,

ordination and settlement dinners, a ticket for which cost fifteen shillings, and even a guinea. Nor is this the worst. I have never seen sobriety, strict, rigid, sobriety violated at these entertainments. It has never but once been my lot to witness, and that was at a private house, a dissenting minister even in the smallest degree approaching to intoxication: but for my own part, I conscientiously object to the whole system of toasts, and especially to toasts in connexion with religious objects and bodies. To give "Prosperity to the union this day formed between the church and its pastor:" or, "Success to the Missionary Society:" or, "Prosperity to Homerton or Highbury College," over a glass of wine, does appear to me an approximation to Bacchanalian customs, which savours in no small degree of conformity to the world; while at the same time it is exposing to peril those who are not "given to much wine." The thumping upon the table and upon the floor, with which toasts and the speeches that support them are generally followed, gives a still more determined aspect of worldliness to such meetings, and must tend to lower those who frequent them as religious men, in the estimation of the spectators and auditors. But as I have already admitted, I believe there is considerable improvement in our habits both as ministers and christians on these occasions. I have spent most edifying seasons of christian intercourse, intelligent discussion, and real devotion, at inns, after public services in the house of God; when the hallowed impressions of the morning, instead of being allowed to evaporate amidst the warmth of undevout conviviality, were sealed upon the heart by the voice of admonition and the exercise of prayer. To all who condemn my scruples, as fastidious squeamishness, or religious

prudery, I reply, we are to avoid the appearance of evil, and are bound to err rather in the extreme of too great strictness, than that of too great laxity of social habits. Our social intercourse does much in the way of moulding individual character; and public meetings do much in the way of giving the tone to private sentiment and feeling.

The system of domestic education adopted by some professors, is almost entirely worldly, genuine religion being altogether secondary, at least in practice, to fashionable accomplishments. The piety of their children is the last thing which many who call themselves christians think of. Schools for girls are selected with far greater solicitude about the dancing, music, and drawing masters, and the French teacher, than for the religious character of the establishment; and in the education of boys, Latin, Greek, and the mathematics, are far more thought of than religion.

Nor must I pass over another odious and criminal indication of worldly-mindedness among professors; I mean deciding as to the sect with which they will unite themselves, and the congregation with which they will worship God, not on the ground of greater adaptation to personal edification, but of worldly respectability. A fashionable section of the Christian Church, and a respectable congregation of that section, are in the present day, among the requirements of some, who would be thought pious too. They wish to go genteelly to heaven. They have no objection to evangelical sentiments, now they can hear them from the lips of a preacher whom the gay and the great flock to hear; and can endure the most heart-searching discourses, since they are delivered to assemblies in which the diamond sparkles, over which the ostrich plume waves, to which the silk-worm has lent the satin and the velvet,

and which the peer dignifies with the coronet. O who would not be religious, when they can join in the same prayer or hymn with the aristocracy of trade or of rank? Alas, alas, such professors, had they lived in the days of the "Man of Sorrows," the reputed son of Joseph the carpenter, who lived on charity, and whom the common people heard gladly, would have been Jews and not Christians, for the former had fashion on their side: or had they lived in the days of the apostles, they would never have been the followers of fishermen and tentmakers, but would have gone with the patrician orders to the temples of the gods.

Beware, then, professors, of the love of the world, even in that form of it which appears most blameless; I mean making it the supreme end of life to get money, though by honest industry; to live genteelly, and to enjoy yourselves on earth.

"So far," says Mr Fuller, "is the love of the world from being the less dangerous on account of its falling so little under human censure, that it is the more so. If we be guilty of any thing which exposes us to the reproach of mankind, such reproach must assist the remonstrances of conscience, and of God, in carrying conviction to our bosoms; but of that for which the world acquits us, we shall be exceedingly disposed to acquit ourselves. It has long appeared to me that this species of covetousness will in all probability prove the eternal overthrow of more characters among professing people, than almost any other sin; and this because it is almost the only sin which may be indulged, and a profession of religion at the same time supported. If a man be a drunkard, a fornicator, an adulterer, or a liar; if he rob his neighbour, oppress the poor, or deal unjustly, he must give up his pretensions to religion; or if not, his religious connexions, if they are worthy of being so denominated, will give him up: but he may love the world and the things of the world, and at the same time retain his character. If the depravity of the human heart be not subdued by the grace of God, it will operate. If a dam be placed across some of its ordinary channels, it will flow with greater depth and rapidity in those that remain. It is thus, perhaps, avarice is most prevalent in old age, when the power of pursuing

other vices, has in a great measure subsided. And thus it is with religious professors, whose hearts are not right with God. They cannot figure away with the profane, nor indulge in gross immoralities; but they can love the world supremely, and be scarcely amenable to human judgment."

Christians, I call you to fight the good fight of faith; one great part of which is, to attack and subdue the world. How can you satisfy yourselves that you are the children of God, if this victory is not gained, when it is said, "Whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Renew the conflict, grapple with the foe, determine by divine grace to conquer. Understand well the means of maintaining the contest and securing the victory. It is by faith alone you can become conquerors: losses, trials, afflictions, disappointments, sorrows, will not do it; they have made men hate the world and flee from it, but not conquer it; have broken their hearts in the world, but not from it; and in some instances have made them cling the closer to what was left. It is faith alone that can really exalt the christian above the sphere of earthly things, and raise him to that lofty mind in which he is so satisfied with the present enjoyment of God, and the hope of future glory, that he is neither weary of the world, nor fond of it. Keep faith in exercise; faith which, by firmly believing in the truth of the gospel revelation, realises the existence of invisible and eternal glory, and by uniting the soul to God through Christ, accepts the blessedness of heaven, as our own ineffable portion. Give yourselves more to the contemplation of heavenly bliss. Consider it is the object of your vocation. "The God of all grace has called us into his eternal glory.' It was matter of the apostle's thanksgiving on behalf of the Thessalonians, that they were called by his gospel

to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. What a calling! And yet by allowing the world to have power and influence over us, we are opposing the holy, divine, and God-like purpose of drawing our hearts up into heaven, and are pulling them down to earth. Has God revealed to us the heavenly state, set open the very doors and windows of the celestial temple, that we may have the lovely prospect, as far as we can have it, before us, and shall we not behold it? Does it become us, is it proper, that we should not open our eyes to heaven, when God has opened heaven to us? Or shall we in effect tell him, that we are too much occupied with the affairs of business, the comforts of home, or the enjoyments of life, to attend to, or hope for, the revealed glory? O how few thoughts we have of it; how little we converse about it. How little does the prospect of the exceeding great and eternal weight of glory weigh down the griefs of our troubles, or the joy of our earthly possessions! There it is, above our heads, bright and effulgent, yet we are too much taken up with the things that are of the earth, earthy, to look at it.

"If one should give a stranger to Christianity an account of the Christian hopes, and tell him what they may be and expect to enjoy before long, he would sure promise himself to find so many angels dwelling in human flesh, and reckon when he came among them he should be as amidst the heavenly quire: every one full of joy and praise. He would expect to find us living on earth as the inhabitants of heaven, as so many pieces of immortal glory lately dropped down from above, and shortly again returning thither. He would look to find every where in the Christian world, incarnate glory sparkling through the overshadowing vail; and wonder how this earthly sphere should be able to contain so many great souls. But when he draws nearer to us, and observes the course and carriage of our lives; when he sees us walk as other men, and considers the strange disagreement of our daily conversation to our so great avowed hopes, and how little sense of joy and pleasure we discover ourselves

to conceive in them, would he not be ready to say, 'Sure some or other (willing only to amuse the world with the noise of strange things,) have composed a religion for these men which they themselves understand nothing about. If they do adopt it and own it for theirs, they understand not their own pretences; they are taught to speak some big words, or give a faint or seeming assent to such as speak them in their names, but it is impossible they should be in good earnest, or believe themselves in what they say or profess.' And what reply, then, should we be able to make? For who can think any who acknowledge a God, and understand at all what that name imports, should value at so low a rate, as we visibly do, the eternal fruition of his glory, and a present sonship to him, the pledge of so great a hope. He that is born heir to great honours and possessions, though he be at great uncertainties as to the enjoyment of them, yet when he comes to understand his possibilities and expectances, how big doth he look and speak? What grandeur doth he put on? His hopes form his spirit and deportment. But is it proportionably so with us? Do our hopes fill our hearts with joy, our mouths with praise, and clothe our faces with a cheerful aspect, and make a holy charity appear in all our conversation?"*

Christian professor, would you then be crucified to the world, and have the world crucified to you; would you in deed, and in truth, have the spirit of the world cast out of you; would you cease to be characterised as minding earthly things, and no longer bear the image of the earthly upon your soul as well as upon your body, go daily by sacred meditation to Mount Calvary, and while all the mysteries of redeeming love, as concentrated in the cross, there meet the eye of faith, and the visions of celestial glory, seen most distinctly from that spot, attract and fix the transported gaze of hope, you will see the beauty of the earth fade away before you, amidst the splendour of a more excellent glory, and feel the love of the world die within you, under the power of a stronger and a holier affection.

* Howe's "Blessedness of the Righteous."

THE END OF TENTH VOLUME.

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